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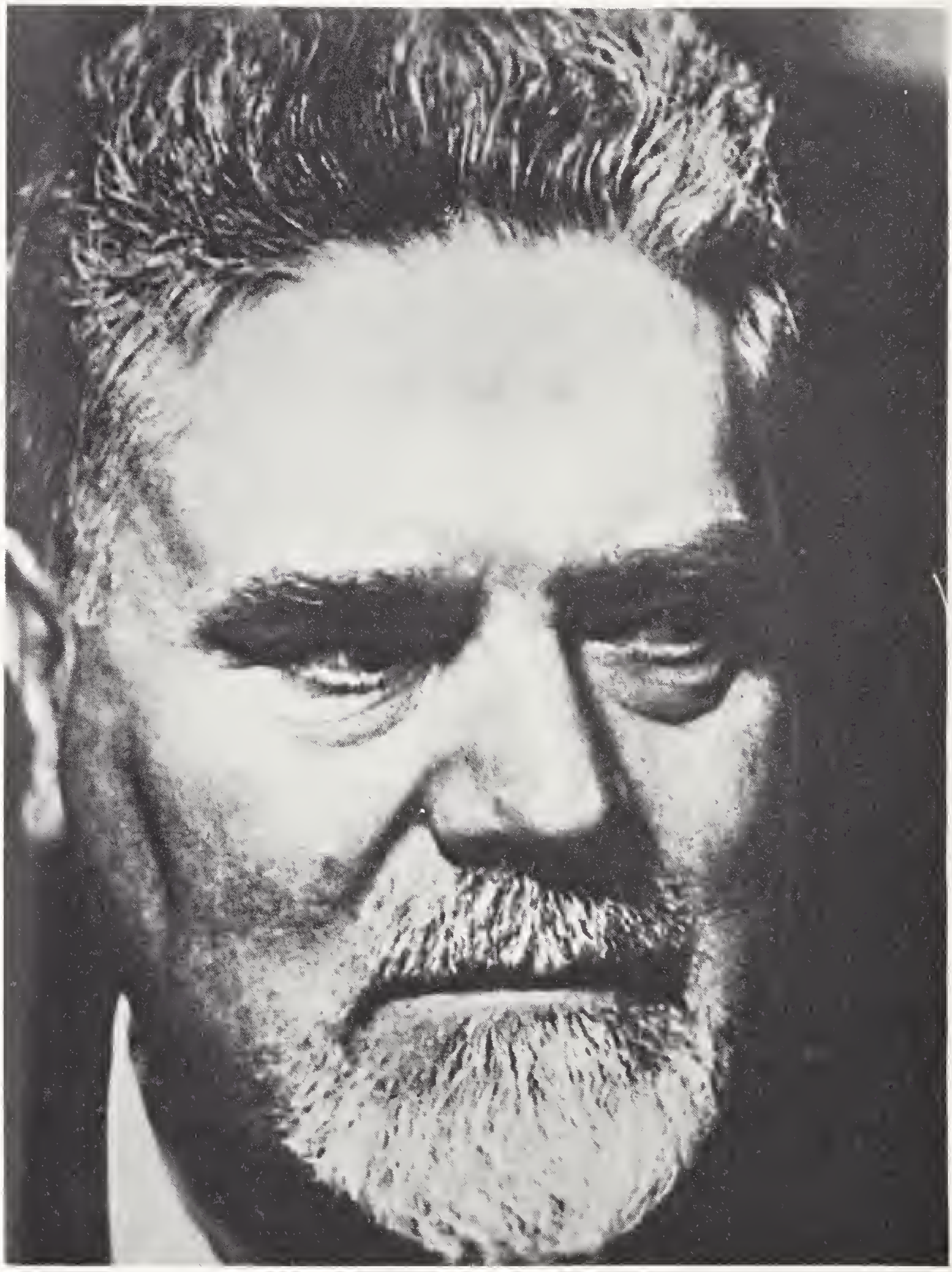

GIOVANNI GENTILE

(Courtesy of Fondazione Giovanni Gentile
per gli Studi Filosofici)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

by Giovanni Gentile

Translated, and with an Introduction
by GIOVANNI GULLACE

Cornell University Press | ITHACA AND LONDON

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Translator's Preface

Giovanni Gentile's *La filosofia dell'arte* was translated into English in 1932 by Edgar F. Carritt (1876–1964), a fellow of University College at Oxford and a distinguished scholar in the field of esthetics. For some reason, however, the translation was never published. A copy of it was deposited in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and remained there wholly neglected until 1960, when H. A. Harris called attention to its existence in the introduction to his translation of Gentile's *Genesis and Structure of Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press).

In the fall of 1967, I undertook to revise the late Professor Carritt's translation on the basis of the final Italian text (his translation was based on the first edition of the book, which Gentile later revised), with the thought of publishing it with an introduction outlining the background and nature of Gentile's esthetic system. But soon after I began, I came to the conclusion that the translation had to be redone altogether. The complexity of Gentile's style, the emphatic tone and the effusiveness of his expression (which are prominent in *La filosofia dell'arte*) constitute a challenge to any translator. Considering the difficulty of the task, it must be said that Professor Carritt did astonishingly well. But his translation was somewhat too literal and tended to be prolix and diffuse—though certainly less prolix and diffuse than the original.

My main concern as translator has been to make the text easy to read and understand.* To achieve this, it was necessary to simplify and reconstruct the extremely long and complex sentences characteristic of Gentile's style in order to render their principal ideas clearly and directly. The lyrical tone of the work, for English readers so obtrusive and inappropriate, had to be muted. In short, I felt it more important to translate the sense rather than the words. Between faithful ugliness and faithless beauty, I have tried to follow a middle course, neither effacing the author's style nor leaving it completely untouched. I hope to have rendered accurately the substance of the book; any loss of brilliance was meant to be a gain in lucidity. Whether I have really achieved my purpose is for the reader to judge.

Although the present text amounts to a complete retranslation, I do not feel that I can claim full credit for it. Professor Carritt's translation, which I kept constantly at hand, together with the Italian original, was of invaluable help to me. If his name does not appear on the title page, it is simply because I, alone, must assume full responsibility for any shortcomings of the translation.

I wish to thank Dr. Benedetto Gentile, son of the philosopher and president of Casa Editrice Sansoni, for authorization to publish the work, and Mr. Noel Carritt, son of the Oxford professor and esthetician, for allowing me full use of his father's translation. My thanks must go also to my wife and to my colleague Professor Carrol Coates for reading the manuscript and the proofs.

GIOVANNI GULLACE

Binghamton, New York

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* The footnotes appearing with the translation are indicated either by numbers or by letters. Those indicated by numbers are in the original; those by letters were added by the translator.

Translator's Introduction

Gentile's Career

Giovanni Gentile was one of two thinkers who dominated Italian philosophy during the first half of this century. The other was Benedetto Croce, with whom he shared the cultural leadership of the country, first as a friend and close collaborator and later (after the advent of fascism in 1922) as an uncompromising opponent. Gentile's influence on Italian thought, education, and political life was considerable, particularly during the fascist regime. Although philosophy was his primary concern, his intellectual activity extended to the fields of history, education, esthetics, literary criticism, and political and social thought. His published works, numbering some sixty volumes, are an almost unparalleled contribution to Italian culture both for their range of interest and their unity and coherence of thought.

Gentile was born in 1875 at Castelvetrano, Sicily. Upon completion of his secondary school education at the *Liceo* in Trapani, he entered the University of Pisa (Scuola normale superiore), where, under the influence of the Hegelian Donato Jaia, he developed a keen interest in idealist philosophy. He graduated in 1897 with a thesis on *Rosmini e Gioberti*, which clearly showed his extraordinary philosophical gift. He began teaching in 1898 at the *Liceo* in Campobasso, and in 1901 he was transferred to the *Liceo* in Naples. In 1903, having obtained the *libera docenza*, he inaugurated a free course in philosophy at the University of Naples with the opening lecture on "La rinascita dell'idealismo" (The Rebirth of Idealism),[1] in which he asserts his opposition to positivism and voices his strongly idealistic orientation.

In 1896, while still a student at Pisa, he had come into contact with Croce, nine years his senior and already on his way to prominence in the intellectual world.[2] Their relations had quickly developed into a close intellectual association. They shared a deep distaste for positivism and materialism, and they were united in their effort to discredit these doctrines and to restore idealist philosophy in Italy. Their collaboration toward this common goal proved in addition to be mutually beneficial to the development and clarification of their thought. From the very beginning, Gentile's sharp observations often forced Croce to rethink his ideas, revise them, or eventually abandon them altogether. Gentile was able to spot the weaknesses of Croce's thought and to remove some of the difficulties the latter encountered along the way. It was under Gentile's influence that Croce undertook a systematic study of Hegel which gave him a new and more definitely philosophical orientation.[3] On the other hand, if Gentile greatly stimulated Croce's speculative endeavors, Croce contributed significantly to the broadening of Gentile's intellectual horizon which, under Croce's influence, extended to the field of literature and history. Their philosophies developed in *concordia discors*, each assuming its own distinctiveness. The founding of Croce's *La critica* (1903), a bimonthly journal devoted to literature, history, and philosophy, marked a most important event not only in their careers, but also in the culture of twentieth-century Italy. The journal gave the two men a powerful instrument for the dissemination of the idealist philosophy which was to revitalize Italian culture.

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[1] Collected later in *Saggi critici*, serie prima (Naples: Ricciardi, 1921).

[2] Croce had alrealy published several works on problems of history, art, and criticism. Gentile, though very young, had just published a scholarly monograph on the comedies of the Renaissance writer Anton Francesco Grazzini, and a few articles.

[3] Croce, *An Autobiography*, translated by R. G. Collingwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 93.

In 1906, Gentile was appointed to the chair of the history of philosophy at the University of Palermo, which he held until 1913. At Palermo he turned his attention to the relation between philosophy and religion, publishing in 1909 *Il modernismo e i rapporti di religione e filosofia.* In 1914, on the death of Donato Jaia, he was called to succeed him at the University of Pisa where he remained until 1917, when he was appointed to the University of Rome as professor of the history of philosophy.

Gentile's philosophy had begun to assume a definite form in 1912 when he published the article "L'atto del pensare come atto puro,"[4] which contained the substance of what in 1916 became his first major theoretical work, the *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro*[5]—a complete formulation of his own idealism; in 1913 he had also published the *Riforma della dialettica hegeliana* and the first volume of his *Sommario di pedagogia* (the second volume appeared in 1914). The differences of thought which had developed between the two philosophers over the years now emerged clearly, and after having gone a long way together they began to draw a clearcut line between their philosophies. In 1913, Croce took the initiative in debating publicly the points of their dissension. The friendly polemic, carried on mostly in the weekly *La voce*[6] in 1913 and 1914, brought into focus the very essence of their conflicting views (see the last section of this Introduction). Their philosophical dissension did not in the least, however, disturb their personal relations.

In 1917, Gentile published the first volume of his second major theoretical work, *Sistema di logica come scienza del conoscere* (the second volume appeared in 1923),[7] and in 1920 he founded the *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* to serve as an outlet for his philosophical doctrine, which Croce continued to oppose, especially in the works of Gentile's disciples. Gentile contributed to *La critica* until January, 1923; but the founding of his own journal definitely emphasized not only the direction of his thought, but a complete departure from Croce's philosophical positions.

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[4] Now in *La riforma della dialettica hegeliana*, Opere complete, vol. XXVII (Florence: Sansoni, 1954), pp. 183–195.

[5] Translated into English by H. Wildon Carr as *The Theory of Mind as Pure Act* (London: Macmillan, 1922).

[6] See now the reprint of *La voce*, edited by Angelo Romanò (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), pp. 595–605, 608–625, 630–638. See also Croce's *Conversazioni critiche*, II (Bari: Laterza, 1950), pp. 67–95.

[7] Never translated into English. Roger W. Holmes' *The Idealism of*

With the advent of fascism in October, 1922, the relations of the two philosophers, which had been a healthy confrontation of philosophical ideas, began to turn now into a clash of political factionalism. After working together for a quarter of a century "to shake Italy out of the doze of naturalism and positivism back to idealistic philosophy,"[8] they found themselves on opposite sides in the political struggle. Upon coming to power Mussolini appointed Gentile Minister of Education, and in this capacity the philosopher carried out a badly needed educational reform, which bears his name.[9] In July, 1924, he resigned his cabinet post but remained ever more active in the affairs of the new regime. Fascism seemed to him to be the direct outcome of idealist philosophy, which had dominated Italiam culture since the turn of the century. Croce himself, still unaware of the danger of the Fascist regime, was rather favorable to Mussolini, hoping that the movement, after restoring order in the postwar chaos, would quiet down and allow things to return to normal. He was happy to see Gentile made Minister of Education, knowing well the latter's competence in educational matters, and he did not seem at all disturbed when Gentile formally joined the Fascist party in May, 1923.

At the end of 1922 Gentile, with the collaboration of Croce and others, founded a new journal, *La nuova politica liberale*. The first issue appeared on January 1, 1923, by which time

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Giovanni Gentile (see note 17 below) is, to a large extent, a critical discussion of the theory contained in this book.

[8] Croce's Introduction to Gentile's *The Reform of Education*, translated by D. Bigongiari (New York: Harcourt, 1922), p. vii.

[9] See preceding note.

Croce had already withdrawn his support, being perhaps in disagreement with Gentile's concept of liberalism. The January issue, in fact, carried an article by Gentile, entitled "My Liberalism," which outlined his political conception, making it coincide with the fascist ideology. He rejects eighteenth-century materialistic individualism, based on the conflict between the State and the individual; and he claims the new liberalism to be the right-wing idealism of the men of the Risorgimento who placed the interest of the country above the interest of the individual. Such liberalism, he emphasizes, is nationalistic and opposed to socialism and democracy.

Gentile and Croce agreed in rejecting the old individualistic liberalism; but their interpretation of the new liberalism varied considerably. Their opposing views were expressed in a series of hostile exchanges during 1924 and 1925.[10] Gentile's liberalism recognized individual freedom only if the individual felt the interest of the State to be superior to his own. Man does not live in isolation, but within the framework of the State, which is an organic unity, not a sum of individualities. The Ethical State, as Gentile calls it, is a moral entity rather than a material organization. The citizen fights to keep it strong, because its strength becomes his own strength; he is willing to die for the State. The essence of Gentile's liberalism, as embodied by the fascist regime, implies a complete dedication to the State, the sacrifice of one's interest and life to the common good, the duty of the State to control the activities of its citizens, from education to the professions.

For Croce, on the contrary, the State is an economic organization—the expression of individualistic utilitarianism.[11]

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[10] See Croce's "Politica in nuce" in *La critica*, XXII (1924), 129–154; *Politics and Morals*, translated by S. J. Castiglione (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), pp. 1–57; *Cultura e vita morale*, 3rd ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1955). Gentile's articles were collected in *Che cosa è il fascismo. Discorsi e polemiche* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1925).

[11] See "Politica in nuce" in *La critica*, XXII (1924), pp. 129–154; *Politics and Morals*, pp. 1–57.

Therefore, the individual is not absorbed by the State; he participates in its activities, through which he strengthens his own individuality. The State is the sum of useful actions by individuals and groups of individuals and it cannot be conceived of as a superior entity having a life of its own above and opposed to that of the single individual. There is no State as a fixed entity, but there are political actions, that is, the Government, which is a dynamic force. The Economic State, as conceived by Croce, is an organization for the achievement of individual aims. The individual may legitimately choose to serve it or not, depending upon his personal interests. In the Ethical State the individual has the duty to serve (even if serving is against his own interests), and to sacrifice himself to the State, which is a superindividual entity.

The increasing disillusion with fascist policies and the assassination of Giacomo Matteotti[12] by the fascists in 1924 led Croce to pass openly to the opposition. But what suddenly deteriorated the relations between Croce and Gentile was the latter's "Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals," written in 1925 on the suggestion of the Fascist Congress meeting in Bologna. The document was meant to emphasize the intellectuals' support of the regime and to explain and defend the fascist policies in the eyes of the nation and the world. The "Manifesto" was printed by the Government and widely publicized on April 21, 1925, the anniversary of the founding of Rome. That Gentile had called Croce, in the course of their exchanges, a "true fascist without a black shirt"[13] (contending that Croce's philosophy was akin to fascist ideology), did perhaps not bother the latter so much as did Gentile's contamination of intellectual life with a dictatorial regime. In answer to the "Manifesto," Croce immediately wrote the "Protest against the Fascist Intellectuals,"[14] signed by a large number of prominent personalities in Italian culture. In the "Protest" he deplores once more the mixing of party politics with philosophical speculation, pointing out that the primary duty of the intellectual is to improve his country's thought and moral life and to raise men above party politics to a higher spiritual sphere; he should concern himself with culture and refrain from supporting violence and the suppression of freedom by a political party. The "Protest," published on May 1, eventually obliterated the "Manifesto," which was never reprinted or referred to again.

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[12] A socialist leader and member of the Chamber of Deputies, the most outspoken opponent of fascism.

[13] "Il liberalismo di Benedetto Croce." See *Che cosa è il fascismo*, p. 154.

[14] See *La critica*, XXIII (1925), 310–312.

In the aftermath of the "Manifesto" Croce officially joined the Liberal party. The breach between him and Gentile now entered a phase of growing personal animosity. While Gentile had become the theologian of the regime, Croce was emerging as the most uncompromising opponent. The result was the polarization of Italian intellectual and political life. Croce was completely ostracized. In 1926 his home was raided by fascist thugs, and various attempts were subsequently made to silence him. Then, recognizing the impossibility of bending him without violence, the regime decided, perhaps for propaganda reasons, to let him carry on his intellectual activities. Although his name was banned from public mention, his books were allowed to appear, as was *La critica*, published even during the war. He had only to be cautious in his criticism, avoiding any direct reference to the regime. In 1929 his speech in the Senate against the Lateran Treaty (the conciliation with the Papacy) was shouted down by a majority of the Senate members; and in 1932 his complete works were placed on the Index by the Catholic Church. Gentile, on the other hand, because of his allegiance to fascism, enjoyed a position of prominence, especially in the world of Italian culture. He was appointed President of the National Fascist Institute of Culture, which was the center of all fascist cultural activities; he was the editor of *Educazione fascista* (formerly *La nuova politica liberale*), which was the official organ of the Institute. A Senator and a member of the Grand Council of Fascism, he headed the Commission on Constitutional Reform established in 1924. From 1925 to 1943 he planned and edited the *Enciclopedia italiana*, the most monumental work of its kind. On the death of the neo-Kantian Bernardino Varisco in 1928, Gentile succeeded him to the chair of theoretical philosophy at the University of Rome, a position that he held for the rest of his academic career. He had identified the cause of fascism with his own philosophical doctrine, thus becoming the "philosopher of fascism," as is attested to by his books dealing with fascist doctrine: *Il fascismo al governo della scuola* (1924), *Che cosa è il fascismo* (1925), *Fascismo e cultura* (1928), *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* (1928). Perhaps, as someone suggested, he thought that he would be able to give the Fascist party an intelligent soul, which would lead it along a wise path. But this marriage of philosophy and political power was not too successful in the end. The Lateran Treaty in 1929 (which meant for him the influence of the Church in education), the perversion of his educational reform by the Fascist party, the growing influence of Nazi Germany on Italian political life (leading to the promulgation of racial laws) were reasons enough for disillusionment. Nevertheless, Gentile never ceased to be involved in the political schemes of the regime. His public utterances to justify the fascist takeover, and his unswerving support of the dictatorship made the debate with Croce increasingly bitter.

World War II was the moment of truth—the political truth on which the two philosophers had debated for nearly twenty years. The disastrous conduct and outcome of the war, the moral ravages of two years of civil war, the violent end of the leaders of the Fascist regime, clearly show the shaky foundation on which the Ethical State was resting. Gentile made no public statement when Italy entered the war on the side of the Germans. He did not approve of Nazi influence on Italian affairs. He continued his support of fascism, however, despite his disillusionment about the party's policies. On June 24, 1943, when the imminent invasion of Italy by the Allies was evident, Gentile delivered in Rome his "Address to the Italians,"[15] calling for national unity. Following the fall of the fascist regime on July 25, 1943, he was subjected to public attacks from new and old antifascists. The Badoglio Government signed an armistice with the Allies in September, 1943; a few days later Mussolini was liberated from captivity by the Germans, and the Fascist Social Republic was created in North Italy, not yet occupied by allied forces. Gentile felt obliged to adhere to this Nazi-dominated puppet regime, headed now by a powerless Mussolini. He was made President of the *Accademia d'Italia*, an office of no political importance; at this point his activity was directed toward healing the wounds that Italians were inflicting on one another in the wake of the political disaster. As a result of his continued support of fascism, he was murdered, on April 15, 1944, by a group of Communist partisans on a street in Florence while returning home from a visit to the Prefecture where he had gone to plead the cause of antifascist professors who had been arrested.[16] At the request of his sons no reprisal was made against the perpetrators of the brutal act. By order of Mussolini, Gentile was buried in the famous church of Santa Croce, where the most eminent men of Italy lie.

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[15] Now in Benedetto Gentile's *Dal discorso agli italiani alla morte* in *Giovanni Gentile: Vita e pensiero*, vol. IV (Florence: Sansoni, 1951), pp. 65–81.

La filosofia dell'arte

Giovanni Gentile's esthetics is almost completely unknown in the English-speaking world even to specialists in the field of literary or artistic theory and criticism. While his philosophical, religious, educational, ethical, and social thought has drawn some attention from students of philosophy,[17] his conception of art is still an island to be discovered; in fact, his major work on the subject, *La filosofia dell'arte*, published in 1931, has until now never appeared in English translation,[18] nor have any of his other writings dealing with the problem of art. Furthermore, no study in English of any of these works existed until recent years. Only in 1957 was a sketchy presentation of Gentile's esthetic theory given in my own article, "Gentile versus Croce—A Comparison of Two Rival Esthetic Systems" (*Symposium*, XI, 75–91). Before the publication of this article two short reviews alone attest, in English-language journals, to the existence of *La filosofia dell'arte*, and no mention at all was made of the other writings related to it.[19] One of the two reviews is by George Boas, who does not seem to have given the work the philosophical attention it deserves: "One could read it with a pleasant feeling of reading a philosophical poem"; it "should be judged by its beauty rather than its truth"; "Gentile can write with sincerity and spontaneity and although one can learn little critical philosophy from his book, one can enjoy a week or two of diverting reading."[20] The other review (translated from the Italian) is by Guido De Ruggero, who took a strongly negative stand on the book: "In Gentile's aesthetics you only find the problems of Croce's aesthetics, and there is not the very least trace of a new question arising from a direct and personal experience of the argument." Only on one point, in De Ruggero's judgment, does Gentile mean to differ substantially from Croce, and that is when he identifies art with feeling rather than the expression of feeling, as theorized by Croce; but even here he "must juggle the term *feeling* to justify his deduction."[21] In 1966,

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[16] See Luigi Villari, *The Liberation of Italy* (Appleton: Nelson Publishing Company, 1959), pp. 119–120.

[17] A complete bibliography of studies in English on Gentile is found in the introduction to his book *Genesis and Structure of Society*, translated by H. S. Harris (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), pp. 53–63. For a discussion of studies in the United States, see pp. 24–33. Most important of them to date are: Merritt M. Thompson, *The Educational Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1934); Roger W. Holmes, *The Idealism of Giovanni Gentile* (New York: Macmillan, 1937); Patrick Romanell, *The Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, An Inquiry into Gentile's Conception of Experience*

(New York: Vanni, 1938); H. S. Harris, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960).

[18] Only fragments in the English translation were included in E. F. Carritt's book *Philosophies of Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931), pp. 320–330.

[19] Titles of these other writings are found on page xxxix below.

[20] *Journal of Philosophy*, XVIII (1931), 698–699.

[21] *Philosophy*, VI (1931), 493–494. A brief mention (six lines in length) by Salvatore Russo is found in *Philosophical Review*, XLV

Merle Brown, in his book *Neo-Idealistic Aesthetics* (Wayne State University Press), devoted a substantial chapter to Gentile and made extensive references to his theory throughout the work. In a subsequent article on recent trends in esthetics and criticism in Italy, he returned frequently, with new insights, to Gentile's esthetic principles and their application to literary criticism.[22] Much still remains to be done, however, to acquaint English-speaking literary critics and theorists with Gentile's esthetics and to provide a clearer understanding of its importance. It is hoped that the present translation will contribute to this goal.

In Italy *La filosofia dell'arte* was viewed as an emphatic rebuttal of Croce's widespread esthetic doctrine; and, as was to be expected, it immediately aroused broad and conflicting reactions. At the time the book was published, relations between the two philosophers had long since been broken and feelings among their followers were very strong. Under these circumstances *La filosofia dell'arte* could not be judged with critical objectivity and serenity. Too much party sentiment had developed to allow unbiased views from either side. Croce considered the book to be simply an act of intellectual arrogance inspired not indeed by love for poetry and art in general (Gentile being, in Croce's words, "an eminently unesthetic man"), but by the author's compulsion to utter his acrimony against "those" (meaning Croce himself) who had been denouncing his "faulty reasoning."[23]

(1936), 638. It refers, however, to an abridged edition for school use in Italy, published in 1934.

[22] "Recent Italian Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXVI (1967–1968), 461–476. See also his article "Italian Criticism after Croce," *Philological Quarterly*, XLVII (1968), 92–116, 253–279.

[23] *La critica*, XXIX (1931), 158. Croce, in calling Gentile "an eminently unesthetic man," forgets that in his review of Gentile's *Logica* a few years earlier (*La critica*, XXII [1924], p. 49) he had praised highly the literary qualities of the book: "There is no need to say that the book adds to its philosophical value a literary quality which in its lively and warm eloquence, is not at all negligible. The readers can testify to this." On the other hand, Gentile's attacks on Croce (especially in *La filosofia dell'arte*), calling him a dualist, a realist, an objectivist, and excluding him from idealism, are in sharp contrast with the earlier tributes to Croce's

The major attacks against *La filosofia dell'arte* were aimed primarily at Gentile's philosophical doctrine. The difficulty in accepting his esthetics resulted from the strong opposition to his philosophy. Croce's esthetics can be accepted without wholly agreeing with his philosophy; Gentile's esthetics, being an integral and almost organic part of his philosophical system, cannot be separated from it; one must accept the whole or none.

Gentile's work is definitely polemical. The author misses no opportunity to take Croce to task, openly or by implication. He finds Croce's esthetics to be merely empirical and not in the least idealistic as it was intended to be. But his relentless criticism seems at times too much inspired by personal animosity to be convincing. "When he speaks of him whom we used to believe his master, almost his other self," wrote George Boas, "he descends to depths which we associate with debating clubs rather than the Lyceum or Academy."[24] Despite the harsh polemical tone of the book, however, it would be completely out of place to suggest that Gentile's main purpose in writing it was simply to conduct a vitriolic attack against his unshakable rival. *La filosofia dell'arte* is an essential part of his mature philosophical doctrine. Gentile was led to esthetics not by a broad literary experience or a strong literary interest, as was Croce, but by a profound philosophical exigency. He regards the esthetic problem as a philosophical problem to be brought within the framework of a philosophical system—a system, that is, capable of defining the nature and place of art in the unity and totality of the life of the spirit. The author, in fact, came to grips with the problem of art, from a systematic point of view, after he had written his major speculative works, such as *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* (1916), and *Sistema di logica come teoria del*

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idealism. In 1909, in reviewing the third edition of the *Estetica*, Gentile concludes: "Croce's *Estetica* has acquired, in this third edition, a full and firm consciousness of its own idealistic character; thus all of its parts have attained a more solid coherence." See *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura*, pp. 168–169. (Throughout this Introduction all quotations from Italian texts are my own translations.)

[24] *Journal of Philosophy*, XVIII (1931), 698.

conoscere (1917–1923)—that is, after he had settled some of the fundamental issues of his philosophy. With *La filosofia dell'arte* Gentile reached the depths of his doctrine. "By delving more deeply into this problem," he writes, "I gained, quite naturally, a more profound insight into all the problems of my philosophy."[25] Therefore, Gentile's esthetics is not an addition to his philosophical system, but the very heart of it, the center from which the power and the life of the system emanate.

Gentile's Philosophy

Gentile's philosophy, which he names "actual idealism," represents the most uncompromising form of subjectivism, for it rejects the possibility of any reality outside and independent of the *act of thinking*. The point of departure of his thought is a criticism of all philosophies which presuppose an objective reality (nature or idea) external to the thinking activity of the subject:

> Idealism is the negation of any reality which can be opposed to thought as independent of it and as the presupposition of it. But more than this, it is the negation of thought itself as an activity, if that thought is conceived of as a reality existing apart from its developing process, as a substance independent of its actual manifestation.[26]

Since all philosophical systems have been unable to escape an objectivistic conception of reality under one form or another, they are all labeled by Gentile as systems of philosophical realism or intellectualism. There are two conceptions of reality—the objectivistic (realistic, naturalistic, intellectualistic), and the subjectivistic (idealistic). The realist speaks of a reality as an independent object existing outside the creative process of the mind; the idealist recognizes as reality only what the mind creates within itself. For the realist the work of the mind is confined to reflecting upon a preconstituted reality; for the idealist the mind is the only creator of reality. The realist accepts a ready-made world and submits to it; the idealist remakes the world by a tireless activity which knows no pause, for the real world of the mind is a perennially creative act.

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[25] Preface, first edition of *La filosofia dell'arte.*

[26] *Theory of Mind as Pure Act*, p. 18.

In the light of this general view, philosophy over the centuries has been, in varying degrees, essentially realistic. It has conceived the world dualistically—subject and object, thought and nature, man as a thinking entity and the outer world as the object of his thinking. As a result, the philosophical problem has centered on the relationship between these independent entities and particularly on how the subject can know the object. Man, therefore, saw reality (whether nature or the universal idea) as alien to his *self*, as an obstacle to his freedom, as a force conditioning his action; and he resigned himself to the role of spectator rather than creator of the world. Unaware that the object exists insofar as the subject thinks it, he considered the world as outside his thought.

This objectivistic conception of the world was, in Gentile's view, the great problem facing philosophical thought; but none of the attempts to overcome the dualism of subject and object and to achieve spiritual unity had ever fully succeeded. Although modern idealism gradually moved toward a conception of reality not as *nature* but as *mind*, it was unable to resolve totally the world of nature into that of mind. Kant, according to Gentile, was the first to seek the absolute unity of the subject and the object in the *act of thinking*. He conceived of no reality outside the thinking process. But his philosophy could not free itself of the noumenal substance, the thing in itself, lying outside the thinking activity. Post-Kantian idealism, while aiming to fuse the noumenon in the process of the spirit, was unable to eliminate all traces of objectivism. Absolute idealism, argues Gentile, was not really absolute, for it ended somehow by admitting an objective reality independent of the *act of thinking*. Its attempt to dissolve all transcendence in the actuality of the spirit and to equate *thinking* and *being* fell short of expectations. Hegelian dialectic did not grasp the absolute subjectivity of thinking and treated logic as the movement of ideas being thought and defined within their own sphere and, therefore, outside the *act of thinking*.

Gentile's "actual idealism" carries the problem to its ultimate stage. His *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro*, and his *Sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere* are a powerful effort to bring all reality within the activity of the mind and thus eliminate the last traces of philosophical realism or intellectualism:

> The idealism which I distinguish as *actual* inverts the Hegelian problem: for it is no longer the question of a deduction of thought from Nature and of Nature from the Logos, but of Nature and the Logos from thought. By thought is meant present thinking in act, not thought defined in the abstract; thought which is *absolutely ours*, in which the *I* is realized.[27]

Idealism, Gentile points out, "aims at conceiving the absolute, the whole, as idea, and is therefore intrinsically absolute idealism."[28] But it would not be absolute unless the idea coincided with the act of knowing it; were the idea not the act itself through which it is known, it would leave something outside itself, and idealism would no longer be absolute: "To understand, much more to know, spiritual reality, is to assimilate it to ourselves who know it. We may even say that a law of the knowledge of a spiritual reality is that *the object* be resolved into the subject."[29] The so-called material reality, external to the *act of thinking*, is illusory. "The material world does exist but only insofar as, by thinking it, we dematerialize it and resolve it entirely into the life of the spirit."[30] If reality did exist outside our thinking and independent of it, there would be no way of knowing it, for the spirit knows only that which it creates in its eternal activity.

In order to understand Gentile's system it becomes necessary to elucidate some of the concepts implied in his terminology. Of fundamental importance is the distinction between concrete and abstract thought (*pensiero pensante* and *pensiero pensato*). Concrete thought is what Gentile calls reality, that is, the totality of the thinkable, or mind as the totality of the thinkable. Abstract thought represents the terms through which the totality of the thinkable (reality) is achieved. The concrete is the whole; it is synthesis, and synthesis implies mediation, that is, a relation of interdependence between the terms of the synthesis. The abstract is immediacy, particularity, singleness which acquires the concreteness of reality only in the synthesis, the organism. Concrete thought is self-consciousness, mind or the spirit, reality, the concrete logos, the act of thinking (all equivalent terms); it is activity, movement, dialectical process. In short, the concrete is a constructive *act*, the abstract is a *fact*, and act and fact seem to play, in Gentile's system, an eternal game of diversification and identification, opposition and reconciliation, unification and multiplication, which constitutes the life of the spirit. Subject and object in their immediacy are merely abstract positions of the dialectical process; they are abstract because they are only elements of the reality which is the spirit; they are not *the* reality: reality is their synthesis. The abstract, therefore, is the particular outside the unity and universality of the whole, the object outside its synthesis with the subject. The concrete is not immediacy but mediation, for immediacy outside mediation is a mere abstraction. Every particular science is abstract, because it remains separated from the whole. Only philosophy (intended as an eternal philosophizing) is concrete, because it represents the totality of the thinkable. Philosophy is the universal science which comprises all particular sciences. It corresponds to the *act of thinking*, to the spirit, which is synthesis, unity, for philosophy seeks the unity implicit in multiplicity. The abstract, in Gentile's words, is the element which the mind ideally distinguishes from reality in order to understand its function in the whole. But, when separated from its immanent relation to the concrete, it falls outside the sphere of the spirit and becomes unthinkable:

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[27] *Ibid.*, 254–255. [28] *Ibid.*, 253. [29] *Ibid.*, 10.

[30] *Sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere*, vol. II, 3rd ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1942), 55.

The two terms, Ego and non-Ego, distinctive of the synthesis in which the Ego itself in its concreteness consists, are not intelligible outside their immanent correlation. The differentiation by which they distinguish themselves from each other within their very identity, is nullified as soon as we prescind from their reciprocal relation. The Ego is that Ego insofar as it is the negation of that non-Ego and conversely. Their synthesis is a priori, and unavoidable.[31]

The stages of the dialectical synthesis can be designated as abstract thought and concrete thought, both springing from the self-synthetic virtue of the Ego. The Ego posits itself as concrete thought by negating abstract thought, which is intrinsic to itself. It posits itself as duality and as unity of abstract and concrete thought, for in its position of unity, it is duality and, therefore, not only concrete but also abstract thought—thought that is not only *thinking* but also *what is thought*, not only an act but a fact. Concrete thought appears as the opposite of the abstract, as the term of a duality; but at the same time as the root, the source of the abstract, as the original unity which posits duality. To conceive of itself is for the Ego to conceive of itself in the very act of conceiving of *other*. The synthesis of concrete and abstract thought, reached through the dialectical process, is the reality of mind, which in its self-realization eternally posits and negates its inactual opposite—nature, which is abstract thought: "In order to attain the concreteness of thought, which is the negation of the immediacy of every abstract term, it is necessary that each abstract term be not only negated but also affirmed."[32]

Mind or the spirit is not, in Gentile's theory, a fixed substance, but a self-creative activity, a dialectical process. The spirit is an act which has neither past nor future, for it contains everything within itself, in an eternal present and eternal becoming, nothing existing outside its own activity. Hence the qualification of "actual" attached by Gentile to his idealism:

> Mind, according to our theory, is act or process not substance. It is very different therefore from the concept of mind in the old spiritual-

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[31] *Ibid.*, vol. II, 82.

[32] *Ibid.*, vol. I, 144.

> istic doctrine. That theory, in opposing mind to matter, materialized mind. It declared it to be a substance, by which it meant that it was the subject of an activity of which it was independent, an activity therefore which it could realize or not realize without thereby losing or gaining its own being. In our view mind has no existence apart from its manifestations; for these manifestations are, according to us, its own inward and essential realization.[33]

Spiritual reality implies mobility and change. It is always moving and never fixed. And what *becomes* never *is*. The spirit therefore is an eternal *act*, an eternal *doing;* it is always a *fieri*, never a *factum* having a reality outside the process of thinking. It is *pure thinking*, for it can never become a product, a particular thought. And pure thinking or pure experience differ from empirical or metaphysical thinking, for these latter presuppose the subject and object as two independent realities in an unresolvable duality. Pure thinking does not exist outside the *thing known*, for the *thing known* coincides with the very act of thinking it; it is subject which is such insofar as it is its own object:

> The thinking is activity, and what is thought is a product of the activity, that is, a thing. The activity as such is *causa sui* and therefore it is freedom. The thing is a simple effect which has the principle of its own being outside it, and therefore is mechanism. The activity *becomes*, the thing *is*. The thing *is* as *other*, a term of the relation to another. In that is its mechanistic nature. Thereby it is one among many, that is, its concept already implies multiplicity, number. The activity, on the contrary, realizes itself in the other, or rather it is realized in itself as other. It is therefore a relation with itself, an absolute, infinite unity, without multiplicity.[34]

The dialectic of the spirit is an internal movement of the Ego in its process of self-realization. Traditional logic, Gentile points out, has been understood as the science of the concept in itself, abstracted from the subject which thinks it, as though the concept had for its object the whole of reality (the subject included) naturalistically conceived. Such logic is the *logic of the abstract*, for it deals with a reality outside the concrete *act of thinking*, that is, the spirit. The *logic of the concrete*, far from denying the abstract, places it within the concrete itself which, as a synthesis of act and fact, concrete and abstract, is the only reality. In other words, traditional logic is the logic of the *concept;* the logic of "actual idealism" is the logic of the *self-concept:* "The concept is the thinking of truth considered objectively and as independent of the act of thinking it. . . . Self-concept is, on the contrary, the thinking of truth as constituted in the very act of thinking it."[35] The dialectical process of the *concrete logos* through which the self-concept is constructed is thus summed up by Gentile in an unusually condensed and enlightening page of his last work, *Genesi e struttura della società:*

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[33] *Theory of Mind as Pure Act*, p. 20.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

> The Ego is not simply Ego, nor yet simply non-Ego; for taken in themselves Ego and non-Ego are mutually equivalent—they are precisely *nothing.* Anyone who looks for a mediated synthesis to emerge from unmediated concepts may equally well begin from the subject or the object. Empiricists and apriorists have this much in common; both parties hold that it is possible to begin from something immediately given. But the immediately given is a mere abstraction; concreteness lies in the mediation of the synthesis through which both subject and object are what they are because each of them is a unity of the two terms. The subject posits the object; but the subject is the synthetic unity, not an abstract something-in-itself. The unity of the synthesis is prior to both subject and object, not consequent to them. The act, the synthetic unity a priori comes first.
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> So that when we say that the Ego posits the non-Ego, this Ego that can do so much is not the pure empty subject, but the act that distinguishes and posits both subject and object. If we distinguish and separate Ego from non-Ego in the synthesis, what we get is not the real Ego (and therefore it does not really posit the non-Ego) nor yet the real non-Ego. The Ego *becomes* Ego through the synthesis within which it posits and so becomes the non-Ego also, since to posit the non-Ego means to posit itself as non-Ego. And on the other hand,

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[35] *Sistema di logica*, vol. II, 153.

through its real opposition to the Ego within the synthesis the non-Ego becomes Ego; for the synthesis involves opposition, but it involves also the *identity* of the opposites. Only this identity can account for the necessary and intrinsic relation between the two terms of the synthesis which requires that the concept of one term must involve the concept of the other.

If it were not for the identity of Ego and non-Ego (subject and object) the object would be a mere *thing*, impenetrable to consciousness and therefore unknowable; and the subject, confined within itself, would be limited by the thing that faced it; the opposition between them would be mechanical and the subject itself would become a thing. In order to rise above this mechanical world of things to the level of conscious freedom we must hold fast to this concept of the creative synthesis that posits the opposed terms and resolves the opposition in a fundamental identity. The Ego becomes Ego inasmuch as it becomes non-Ego; and the non-Ego is truly non-Ego inasmuch as it is not merely opposed to the Ego but also identical with it.[36]

The three terms of the dialectical process—subject, object, synthesis—develop from one another in three moments which are in a logical, not a chronological, sequence; they are progressive but not successive, for they are co-present and simultaneous. The actuality of the spirit (reality) is a present which never ends, for the synthesis in which the spirit actualizes itself generates a new subjectivity, and the dialectical process begins again, the life of the spirit being an eternal circular movement. The subject becomes object, and from the object (which is also subject) a new subject springs. The spirit is a perennial becoming whose reality lies in every new synthesis of its two abstract positions—that of pure subjectivity and that of pure objectivity. The spirit cannot be divided, as Croce divided it,[37] into successive moments or degrees of awareness, each having its own reality, for reality is only in the unity of the *act of thinking* which has no moments as degrees of reality but has only abstract positions. It is not enough to say that reality is spirit, if the spirit is conceived as something similar to nature—an objective entity. Reality is the spirit in the infinite *acts of thinking* through which it realizes itself; and the *act of thinking* is but the inward dualization by which the synthesis of self-consciousness is achieved. The *act of thinking* is more than creation; it is self-creation and, therefore, *causa sui*, since it is productive of both subject and object in the unity of their synthesis. The constructive process of the object is altogether the constructive process of the subject:

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[36] *Genesis and Structure of Society*, pp. 98–99.

[37] Croce divided the activity of the spirit into four distinct forms: the esthetic, the logical, the economic, the ethical; the first two defined as "theoretical" and aimed at *knowing*, the second two as "practical" and aimed at *doing*.

> The subject in this constructive process, the subject which resolves the object into itself, at least insofar as the object is spiritual reality, is neither a being nor a state of being. Nothing but the constructive process *is*. The process is constructive of the object just to the extent that it is constructive of the subject itself. And therefore instead of saying *verum et factum convertuntur*, we ought to say *verum et fieri convertuntur*.[38]

In this respect, Gentile claims, "actual idealism" marks a long step forward in relation to Kantian and post-Kantian idealism, for it shows the impossibility of the concrete existence, even of the subject, outside its conjunction with the object in the *act of thinking*.

The radical abolition of any fixed reality in and for itself, outside the dialectical process of the spirit, led Gentile to conceive of reality as an original possession and not a conquest, a revelation from within and not a teaching from without, a creation and not an explanation. Knowing is identified with doing, for it is impossible for the spirit to know what is already done, every reality being the very constructive process which posits it. Thinking and doing are not two distinct levels of spiritual activity, but one and the same spiritual act.

"Actual idealism" is thus a philosophy of *absolute immanence*, profoundly different from other immanentistic philosophies, since these philosophies lack the concept of the absolute spirituality of the real. Gentile's doctrine, by bringing the object within the subject, the fact within the act, nature within mind, multiplicity within unity, time and space within the subjective activity, encloses everything within the *act of thinking*, which cannot be transcended. Nothing can fall out of the subject-object relation. The logical outcome of this is the definitive negation of philosophy as metaphysics and the identification of philosophy as life. Philosophy is but philosophizing. "Actual idealism" appears, thus, as a broadly humanistic conception of reality, since it places the *act of thinking* at the central position of the philosophical problem and confers on man the sense of his deep responsibility. And the *act of thinking*, which is *causa sui*, contains within itself the terms of its own realization. Each of these terms (subject, object, synthesis) is immanent in the other. The subject implies the object and conversely, and both imply their synthesis. Both subject and object need each other to overcome their immediacy and abstractness and to enter the sphere of reality through their synthesis. But the spirit is similar to Leibniz' monad which has no windows. The life of the spirit is all internal, obeying only its own inner energy. Man is therefore free and moral, because no external factor limits his action. Space and time are the creation of his own spirit.[39] The spirit is all because it is nothing in particular; it is pure *thinking*, pure *knowing*, a sort of pervasive energy; whenever it is something, it is an individuality actualizing itself within its own world—a poem, an action, a word, a system of thought. But such a world is real insofar as the poem is being composed, the action is being accomplished, the word is being uttered, the thought is being developed into a system. The poem *was not* and *will not be;* it *is* insofar as it is being composed or recomposed in reading it. Its reality is an eternal present, because it lives concretely in the act of composing and recomposing it. Once the poem is composed, the action accomplished, the word uttered, the system completed, they are things, they become abstract positions of the dialectical process. They do not lose their spiritual nature by falling into absolute and static objectivity; if they did they would become unknowable, and they would, at the same time, imply the impossibility of mind. For if there were something outside mind, in the absolute sense, mind would be limited by it and would no longer be mind. The otherness of historical fact, as well as that of nature, are none other than the objectivity of the Ego to itself. They are, insofar as they are the creation of the Ego which finds them within itself and produces them in the eternal process of self-creation. Their intrinsic relation by which they are opposed to and identical with the subject holds them within the sphere of the spirit. For there is no historical reality as a fact in the past; reality is always present. Plato is not for us a man who lived in the past; as such he would be outside the domain of the spirit and therefore unknowable. The Plato we know, Gentile points out, is of our own creation; he comes into being when we read his works or read about him. Every epoch, every man, in fact, created a different Plato through the *act of thinking*. Every fact in the past is an abstraction until it lives in our self-consciousness.

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[38] *Theory of Mind as Pure Act*, p. 18.

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[39] See *ibid.*, pp. 115–136.

> We may sum up our doctrine as the theory that mind, the spiritual reality, is the act which posits its object in a multiplicity of objects, reconciling their multiplicity and objectivity in its own unity as subject. It is a theory which withdraws from mind every limit of space and time and every external condition. It declares that a real internal multiplication which would make one of its moments a conditionate of anterior moments is inconceivable.[40]

Mind is neither spatial nor temporal, for space and time are the essential forms of the multiplicity of the real. Mind is the unity immanent in the multiplicity, in nature, which is its spatial and temporal expression. When we take mind as an individual or natural thing, an object among other objects, a person among other persons, it takes its place among the spatio-temporal multiplicity of nature. But this does not minimize its universality, for the individual and the universal are the two terms whose synthesis constitutes spiritual reality. "The individual and its correlative universal . . . are clearly neither two objects nor two static positions of thought. The category of being does not properly belong to them, since strictly speaking, there *is* no individual and no universal."[41] Both universal and individual are abstract positions though not static, for their concreteness is their unity.

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

It is by the abstract universal that thought thinks, but the abstract universal is not thought. The abstract individual is only one of the terms of the thought which we want to intuit, to feel, to grasp as it were in a moment, to take by surprise. Neither universal nor individual is concrete thought, for taken in its natural meaning the universal is not individualized as it must be to be real; nor is the individual universalized as even it must be to be ideal, that is, to be *truly* real.[42]

The most original part of Gentile's philosophy seems to be the assertion that the constructive process of the object is altogether the constructive process of the subject—that is, that the subject posits itself in its concrete existence in the very act of opposing itself to its object and in the consequent identification with it (self-synthesis). Yet this is also the most controversial aspect of his philosophy and the hardest to understand. What can this thinking activity ever be without a thinking subject exercising it? If the subject posits itself in opposing itself to the object, what can it be before positing itself? And if it is *nothing* how can it bring about the dialectical process? In other words, if the subject does not exist before the *act of thinking*, who performs this act? It seems that the thinking activity comes out of nothing. What is its starting point, unless we presuppose something given, beyond human comprehension? In his effort to eliminate all traces of duality, Gentile built up a system by rejecting any presupposed being; hence the major difficulty of his "actual idealism." Since it is generally assumed that every philosophy must have a starting point, a reality existing independently—thought or nature, the subject or the object, or both—the attempt to resolve everything into the spirit (*act of thinking*, self-consciousness), which is *causa sui*, did not convince the critics. The spirit and its abstract positions seemed to be nothing but *flatus vocis*. All criticism leveled at Gentile's system bears heavily on the problem of the subject-object relation and the fact that neither subject nor object has an existence in and for itself. The effort of the author to resolve two abstractions (subject and object) in a form, and the only form, of reality seemed to end only in a verbal solution. Objectivity, under one form or another, was viewed by the critics as something inescapable. To reduce the solidity of *essence* to the mobility of *existence* was considered an impossible task. It is not possible to think without a thinking subject and an object of thinking. In our common experience we are aware that thought exercises itself on a *given* reality, which it must recognize and which it is not able either to deduce or to construct initially. Is it possible to include in one concept the reality of knowing and the known? Since there can be no knowing unless there is something to be known, it is necessary to presuppose a being as the condition of knowing—a being independent of our mind. Gentile, on the contrary, maintains that the concept of independent being confronting the mind is self-contradictory, for independent being is by definition unknowable, and unknowability cannot be the condition of knowing. Here the great antinomy of knowledge: on the one hand the necessity of the object, on the other the necessity of resolving the object into the subject. For Gentile, however, the opposition between subject and object is an opposition within one reality—mind—and immanent in its nature. It is not an opposition between two different realities:

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[41] *Ibid.*, p. 107. [42] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

> Speaking strictly, there can be no *others* outside us, for in knowing them and speaking of them they are within us. To know is to identify, to overcome otherness as such. *Other* is a kind of stage of our mind

through which we must pass in obedience to our immanent nature, but we must pass through without stopping.[43]

On the other hand, if the object is within the subject because the latter negates itself in the former, there would be diversity only in name between the two; their relation would be one of identity. Therefore, the dialectical process (becoming, opposition), only possible when there is a real otherness, would be a meaningless word.

Another problem emerging from the criticism of "actual idealism" is that of the relation between the universal and the individual, between the infinite and the finite, between the unity and the multiplicity of the spirit. Can the infinite, the mind, be infinite in the finite, where its activity is restricted? How can the universal be universal and individual at the same time? How can unity be unity and multiplicity all in one? Gentile's answer to these questions is implicit in his conception of mind as dialectical process and in his conception of absolute immanence. Mind is development, and development implies both unity and multiplicity, both infinity and finitude: it affirms an immanent relation between them. Multiplicity shows the life of unity, the finite *being* shows the life of the infinity of *thinking*. Unity and infinity have no existence apart from their manifestations. This solution, which submerges and fuses all distinctions as degrees of reality in a unity which is the only reality, brought on Gentile the accusation of mysticism, for mysticism rejects diversity and conceives of reality as the absolute. In Gentile's doctrine the absolute is the *act of thinking* (self-consciousness, mind or the spirit), for there is nothing from which to distinguish it. A system which postulates that art in its concreteness is not art but philosophy, that religion and science are not religion and science but philosophy, that practical activity in all its forms is also philosophy, and that philosophy is all reality—the *act of thinking*—such a system was certainly bound to spell mysticism and to recall Hegel's expression in reference to Schelling's doctrine that "In the dark all cows look black."

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

But Gentile counters the accusations of mysticism (coming from Croce[44]) in the last chapter of his *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro*—a chapter which was added to the third edition of the work in order to disprove the charges:

> The conception to which I have tried to give expression, a conception which resolves the world into spiritual act or act of thought, in unifying the infinite variety of man and nature in an absolute one, in which the human is divine and the divine is human, may appear, and has been pronounced, a mystical conception. And indeed it concurs with mysticism in affirming that the whole is one, and that to know is to attain this one behind all the distinctions.[45]

But "actual idealism," Gentile argues, while concurring with mysticism in its need for a contact with the divine, rejects its fundamental principles: "Idealism reconciles all distinctions, but does not, like mysticism, cancel them, and it affirms the finite no less resolutely than it affirms the infinite, difference no less than identity."[46] Mysticism is to be regarded as an intellectualistic doctrine. It is affirmation of the absolute as extrinsic to the affirming activity. In relation to philosophy, it is immediacy; it is like an object, static, and incapable of movement, for movement would imply the activity of the subject, which is here suppressed. A static object means in fact a static subject. The difference between mysticism and intellectualism is that mysticism presumes to attain the absolute by means of love, intellectualism by means of knowledge. But mysticism agrees with intellectualism in conceiving its love as an object, and the process of the absolute as a process which confronts mind. Reality is for both an absolute object, outside the mind's process, and already realized before such a process begins. The mystic's absolute reality is not subject but object: "Mysticism is the position of an immediate object—abstract and inactual religion."[47] Therefore, Gentile's philosophy is the criticism of mysticism, since for "actual idealism" immediacy is an abstract position of thought, and not a reality.

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[44] See *Conversazioni critiche* (Bari: Laterza, 1951), vol. II, 83–95; vol. IV, 297–341.

[45] *Theory of Mind as Pure Act*, pp. 265–266.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 266–267.

Perhaps the accusation of mysticism, in the light of Gentile's keen analysis, can be easily dispelled. However, the substance of the objection to Gentile's philosophy still holds. For "actual idealism," monistic by its own nature, annuls all distinctions and fuses everything in the dynamic process of *thinking*. The subject is nothing in itself, the object is nothing in itself, nor are art and religion in their purity. Only their synthesis is real. Nevertheless, Gentile argues that in the synthesis subject and object are ever present because the spirit is a dialectical process, a *becoming* of the subject-object relation. But "actual idealism" derives everything from the subject; the object once asserted by the subject becomes itself subject. As a result the moment of objectivity does not exist, for the opposite disappears in the whole and ceases to be opposite. Despite its absolute monism, Gentile's philosophy is in no way the expression of mysticism. The accusation of mysticism leveled at it is perhaps the result of a polemical debate which forced the sense and the spirit of it.

Gentile's Esthetic Theory

Gentile's *La filosofia dell'arte* is, to a large degree, already implicit in his major theoretical works—*Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* and *Sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere*. A number of other writings need to be mentioned here, however, for they show the growth of the author's esthetic conception within the framework of his philosophical development. Gentile's interest in the problem of esthetics was undoubtedly aroused by Croce's early work on the subject. His first writings directly relating to the problem deal in fact with Croce's esthetics, which he followed in all its development.

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[47] *Sistema di logica*, vol. II, 374.

Several articles, critical reviews, and notes, collected in the volume *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura* in 1920, attest to his close collaboration (in friendly polemic) with Croce. But while Gentile collaborated with his older friend in a common effort to revive idealistic philosophy, his thought gradually moved in a direction of its own. The spirit of friendliness pervading his analyses of discussions of Croce's thought cannot completely hide the growing intellectual dissension between the two men.

In 1909, Gentile gave his first theoretical formulation of the problems of art in "Le forme assolute dello spirito" (see his *Il modernismo*), in which his position is clearly outlined. He touched subsequently upon the problem, with new insights, in his *Sommario di pedagogia*,[48] in 1913, and in the essay "L'esperienza pura e la realtà storica,"[49] presented in November, 1914, as the opening lecture of his course in theoretical philosophy at the University of Pisa. But his major steps toward *La filosofia dell'arte* were made later in the essays "Arte e religione" (1920),[50] "Il sentimento" (1928),[51] and in the article "Arte" (1929),[52] where his opposition to Croce's esthetics is overt and direct.

La filosofia dell'arte embodies, in a systematic form, the results of all of Gentile's previous speculation and his more comprehensive and mature thought. The volume is divided into two parts—"The Concreteness of Art," and "The Attributes of Art,"—preceded by a long introduction, "The Problem of Art," which stresses the philosophical nature of the problem. The first part is an emphatic restatement and amplification of ideas substantially expressed in previous writings; the second, on the contrary, includes new research dealing with more specific matters (the nature of language, literary technique, literary types, the distinction of the arts, taste and genius, criticism, the problem of translation, the history of art, the function of art, art and morals, etc.) and is therefore more interesting for the practical critic than the abstract formulations contained in the preceding parts of the work. The general features of Gentile's treatment of the subject are on the one hand the polemic against Croce, on the other the construction of his own esthetics along the lines of "actual idealism."

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[48] Vol. I, part III, chap. 5; vol. II, part II, chap. 1.

[49] Collected in *La riforma della dialettica hegeliana*, 2nd ed. (1922); see now 3rd ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1954), pp. 233–262.

[50] Published in *Giornale storico della filosofia italiana*, I (1920); now in *Opere complete* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), vol. XXXVI, pp. 135–156.

[51] Published in *Giornale storico della filosofia italiana*, IX (1928); now in *Opere complete* (Florence: Sansoni, 1948), vol. XXXVI, pp. 34–60.

[52] Published in the *Enciclopedia italiana* (Treccani), vol. IV (1929); now in *Opere complete* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), vol. XXXVI, pp. 121–134.

Gentile's esthetic springs, as does Croce's, from his firm opposition to positivist and empiricist theories which consider art as a *fact* rather than an *act*. Art is for him an operation of the mind and not an object to be contemplated. And he goes as far as to take issue with Croce for asking the question "What is art?" since the question implies the existence of something called art, an empirical entity. A more appropriate question, in his opinion, would have been "Does art exist?" For both Croce and Gentile art is a form of knowledge; but they differ sharply on the sort of knowledge art represents and, therefore, on the place it has in the life of the mind. Their basic disagreement, which involves their respective philosophical systems, centers on the nature of feeling (*sentimento*) and the relation of feeling to thought. Gentile's position here is radical and original, perhaps more rigorously logical than Croce's. His central problem is to explain the distinction between esthetic and philosophical experiences. Is art feeling, is it the expression of feeling, or is it thought? Gentile's originality consists in having overcome the distinctions by fusing them into the oneness and totality of the *act of thinking*. Feeling and thought cannot be separated or distinguished (except in the abstract), for they are one inside the other in their actuality.

In order to understand the position of Gentile's *La filosofia dell'arte* in his philosophical system, it is necessary to consider his concept of feeling, which is central to the problem of art.

Already in the essay "Le forme assolute dello spirito" Gentile identifies feeling with pure subjectivity (the subject in its immediacy), and pure subjectivity with art: "Art is consciousness of the subject, religion consciousness of the object, and philosophy consciousness of the synthesis."[53] But the immediate position of the subject (pure subjectivity) is an abstraction which acquires reality in the mediation with the object in the *act of thinking*. Art, therefore, in its abstract principle, is pure subjectivity (feeling); in its concrete existence (the work of art), it is the synthesis of feeling and thought. Prior to feeling there is nothing; prior to the *act of thinking* there is no reality. Feeling is the very principle of reality, the soul which gives life to thought. Without feeling, thought would be dead. There is no such thing as the overcoming of feeling by thought (as Croce would have it), for the former does not exist as a reality outside the latter. Feeling and thought are not at all irreconcilable, as are darkness and light. Since feeling can come within the sphere of spiritual experience only as the animating principle of thought, it is impossible to see it outside reflective experience, that is, outside self-consciousness. In vain does man, who seeks truth through reflection, try to defeat feeling. He cannot escape it, for it is the very passion for truth. Reflection, with its critical examination, cannot dissolve the sentimental content of life, the unsatisfied desire which drives man to search for knowledge. No philosopher or scientist can suppress passion, for it is precisely passion which animates his meditation and compensates him for his effort with the joy of victory. The philosopher, Gentile intimates, is not apathetic; he does not live in an ataractic state of mind, far removed from the storm of passions; even when he retreats from the world, the desire for truth burns in his heart. If he extinguished his passions, he would destroy in his spirit the very source of life, for feeling is the very principle of any living reality. It is absurd to speak of feeling not yet touched by thought or of thought free of feeling, for thought could not be thought without also being feeling.

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[53] "Forme assolute dello sprito" in *Il modernismo*, 3rd ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1962), p. 265.

Feeling is dialectical in character. It is joy as opposed to suffering and conversely; and it does not lose its dialectical nature even in its cathartic moment, for feeling is not a static condition, but a never-ending process. Pleasure without pain, a pure beatitude free of bitterness, is an absurdity, since each position, deprived of its negativity, would be an abstraction—static, inert, bereft of life, which is dialectical movement. Feeling asserts itself in negation. Joy and pain end and then begin again in a continuous rhythm in which they acquire an ever new form of being. A stable joy is not a joy, for its life is a continual emerging from its contrary. Every being implies a non-being, every pleasure implies a pain; they exist concretely only in the dialectical negation of their abstract positions. Their abstractness cannot be overcome by mixing them; two opposites are not parts which can be put together: they are opposites because one devours the other. Their union is a dynamic process which receives and resolves the opposites into a synthesis. The movement is the *act of thinking*, the synthesis of subject and object, that is, the subject itself in its concreteness: "For . . . the very dialectic, peculiar to the synthesis, is immanent in the subject. Not only is the positive activity immanent in the subject, but also the negative activity, since both together constitute the one eternal activity which is the dialectical self-creation of the spirit."[54]

But in the process by which the immediacy of spiritual life (which is feeling) is resolved into the act of self-consciousness, the subject cannot divest itself of this immediacy: passion survives philosophy, in which one would expect to find liberation from passion. For all the effort to knowledge, expressed by the dialectical process, is spurred on by the power of feeling. Thought implies feeling, and it could not be thought without first being feeling.

This conception of feeling as the content of thought or of thought as the form of feeling marks Gentile's originality and his difference from Croce's position. For Croce feeling and thought, art and philosophy, are separated and placed in two different spheres of spiritual activity. Feeling has for him its concrete existence regardless of thought. Gentile, on the contrary, fuses thought and feeling in the *act of thinking:* feeling is intrinsic to thought, and only their synthesis is a concrete reality. There is no expression of feeling which is not, at the same time, self-consciousness, that is, thought. No feeling is a reality outside the consciousness of feeling, for prior to consciousness there is nothing. There is a basic difference between a spiritual act and the awareness of that act, between dreaming and reconstructing the dream. Awareness is reflection; it is relation of subject to object as self-creation. Self-creation implies the position of the subject and the negation of its own abstract position—a negation in which it posits itself as subject, object, and reciprocal relation, with all elements immanent in one another.

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[54] Page 144 below.

The subjectivity of feeling, which is the source of spiritual life, when exposed to the dialectical negation displays the most essential characteristic of the spiritual act—art. Gentile agrees with Croce that art is intuition; but intuition is for Gentile mediation and therefore self-awareness. There is no intuition, theoretical in character, which is immediate, for every act of knowledge is a reflective act. The intuition which is immediate is not knowledge but an abstract position, which becomes a theoretical act in the synthesis, that is, in its mediation. It is clear, then, that the artistic quality cannot be denied to any concept or to any logical or philosophical work; nor can one assume, from the intuitive nature of art, the unesthetic nature of every work of thought, as Croce did. Gentile does not deny the lyrical character of art. Feeling is always present, because it is the very source of the spirit; but this does not exclude the consciousness which controls the life of art. On the other hand, feeling is impossible to grasp in its immediate position, that is, outside the *act of thinking*.

Gentile argues that the particular, which Croce had first conceived as the matter of esthetic intuition, is simply a myth; for no particular can be seen unless it is in the light of the universal, in self-consciousness, where individuality and universality coincide. Intuiting is already thinking, for thought, as the mediation of the immediate, is itself intuitive. It is subjectivity which displays and asserts itself in the *act of thinking*. Intuition and feeling, in their reality, are the same thing—thought. Art is not a degree of reality historically ascertainable, but an ideal form distinguishable only abstractly in the reality of the spirit. In its abstract position, art is pure subjectivity, that is, feeling in its immediacy; in its concrete existence it is thought. In other words, there is art and there is the work of art: the abstract principle and the concrete realization. Art is both actual and virtual, depending on whether we grasp it in the concreteness of the synthesis or in the abstract distinction within the synthesis. In every work of genius there is an intuitive element resolved into thought. There is the subject but mediated in the necessary relation subject-object: there is no art without philosophy. There is no abstract meditation in which the heart of man does not beat, in which there is no flame of passion, in which the subject does not suffer or enjoy. Between art and thought there is no identity, nor is there the opposition claimed by the doctrine of the autonomy of art. The relation between art and thought is a dialectical one: it is not the opposition between the immediacy of art and the mediation of philosophy, for art and philosophy exist only in their synthesis—the constructive process of the work of art. Art cannot exist without thought nor thought without art. The one is immanent in the other and both actualize themselves in their synthesis. Pure art, outside thought, is pure nothingness. Those who want pure art—virgin, uncontaminated by thought—will embrace a shadow, an inconsistent abstraction, instead of real art, of a living body. Similarly, those who imagine thought as completely free of feeling will have a lifeless thing, void of any subjectivity. In all great poets there is a great thought permeated by feeling—a thought which elevates our minds and gives us the sense of human greatness and leads us to think, to meditate, to perceive a high truth. Art is not the expression of feeling, but feeling itself immanent in thought. In other words, art is the form of subjective feeling given to any thought or act of the spirit. Thought and feeling are like body and soul.

In Gentile's opinion, Croce, by conceiving of feeling as the content of intuition, ends in an esthetics of content while asserting one of form. The specific content—feeling—that Croce attributes to art cannot be converted into form, because in Croce's theory it has already an autonomous existence with a form of its own. It designates, in fact, the practical form of the spirit. Croce defines art as an *a priori* synthesis, but he is unable to show the *a priori* virtue which generates that synthesis. He speaks of the conversion of content into form, but his procedure seems to be more an addition of form to content than a real synthesis. He is unable to determine the *quid* which constitutes the relation between feeling and intuition, because he conceives of feeling as outside intuition, as an objective entity. That feeling is the only content which lends itself to artistic elaboration is unquestionable; but there cannot be a passive feeling and an active intuition: there is rather an intuition as the form of feeling, that is, a feeling itself disappearing in its form. Feeling cannot exist alone, in its immediacy, for, in order to exist, it must distinguish itself from what is not feeling. Insofar as it is immediate, it is silent; it speaks only when it takes part in the dialectical process of the spirit. Its expression, then, is no longer feeling but thought, self-consciousness. Without the dialectic of the total rhythm of the spirit in its actuality, feeling would be static: its development is the development of the whole spirit.

Croce's doctrine, especially his distinction between feeling and intuition, is sharply criticized by Gentile, who sees in it the persistence of an unresolved dualism. Croce's conception of art as intuition-expression (the two coinciding) and of intuition-expression as prelogical knowledge (a state of indistinction between reality and unreality) cannot withstand Gentile's rigorous analysis applied from a strictly unitarian point of view. Art, Gentile asserts, cannot be prelogical or alogical knowledge since intuition is knowledge obtained through the mediation of an object (feeling in Croce's theory), and mediate knowledge is thought. Either intuition coincides with feeling and, therefore, with the subject in its immediacy (and in this case it is not art in its concrete form, but in its abstract position), or it mediates feeling and thus becomes self-consciousness, that is, thought. One cannot admit the existence of feeling outside the sphere of consciousness without falling into dualism. In Gentile's judgment, Croce tends to separate the activities of the spirit, whereas all the effort of philosophy had been to fuse everything in the *act of thinking*. Hence Gentile's uncomplimentary remark: "He who believes that this conception of art (his own) is panlogistic proves that he knows only how to distinguish things, not ideas; for only things can be distinguished, being one outside the other; ideas, on the contrary, are all inside one another."[55]

For Gentile the spirit is a living unity and not a sum of functions operating in separate stages of the spiritual process. Every act of the spirit involves the whole spirit in all its forms and articulations. In the unity of the spirit it is impossible to distinguish art from what is not art, because art in itself is not a reality, but an abstraction acquiring reality in the work of art, that is, in the medium in which it realizes itself; and the work of art is the expression of the whole spirit, which is the *act of thinking*. Art, therefore, in its concrete form, is living thought—living because animated by feeling, which is its generative principle. In its abstract position, art is feeling in its immediacy, pure subjectivity, the primordial moment of the spirit whose intrinsic nature is to develop into the concreteness of the *act of thinking:* hence the lyrical essence of art. In its concrete existence, art is the constructive process culminating in the work of art; it is the word becoming flesh and inseparable from it. The artist is also a thinker, because without thought art cannot actualize itself in the work of art; nor can it manifest itself, for language arises together with self-consciousness. Art is the form of a content—a form which is immanent in such a content, being its living principle. But the content is not an antecedent of art; as such it is an abstraction. In its concrete reality it is resolved into form: it is form—the form of self-consciousness in which all concrete distinctions disappear.

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[55] "Il sentimento," *Introduzione alla filosofia*, *Opere complete*, vol. XXXVI, 2nd ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1952), p. 53.

Gentile's doctrine is, in fact, one of *absolute formalism*, form being conceived as the self-creativity of the spirit. The work of art is the world of the artist rising to consciousness, that is, shaped by consciousness into a form of knowledge. The poet, therefore, is a complete personality—a philosopher and a man of action at the same time. A work of art, Gentile reiterates, which is not also a work of thought, cannot exist; for any work of thought is as much art as any work of art. The artistic quality can be present even in the exposition of a philosophical system. Thought cannot exist without art; nor can art actualize itself outside thought, as Croce would have it. In a work of art all is proportionate to thought; esthetic mediocrity is the result of logical and ethical mediocrity. The work of a great poet always expresses a universal concept of life. Croce's conception of art as alogical knowledge, mere contemplation without judgment, is for Gentile a contradiction in terms. Knowing is judging, and one cannot attribute a theoretical character to intuition, as Croce did, without recognizing as essential its capacity for distinction, which is judgment and, therefore, logical knowledge. Outside this form of knowledge there is only the silent immediacy of pure subjectivity. While for Croce artistic beauty is the perfect expression of feeling, for Gentile it is feeling itself, the *deus absconditus* pervading the reality of the work of art.

The conception of art led Gentile to a new solution of a number of specific problems more closely related to literary criticism (Part II of *La filosofia dell'arte*). The first of them, in the order of importance, is that of language. Is language the expression of feeling or of thought? For Croce, who considers art as intuition of feeling, language is the intuition itself as the form of feeling. But since in his theory esthetic intuition is an alogical elaboration of the object by the spirit, language belongs to the alogical sphere of spiritual activity. Gentile agrees with Croce that art and language were born at the same time; but by rejecting Croce's conception of art as alogical reality, he must also reject his theory of language. Since art in its concrete reality is for Gentile self-consciousness, language, he maintains, arises with the awakening of self-consciousness. He who seeks language in a moment prior to the *act of thinking* will find only pure subjectivity, which is completely silent. Only when pure subjectivity develops into self-consciousness can it speak and express itself. There is no language without thought. In the history of nature self-consciousness begins with man, and man is the only speaking animal: "To advance in self-consciousness through an ever deeper self-analysis (which involves the analysis of all things), to advance in thought and knowledge, is to progress in the power of exactly expressing one's inner life."[56] Language, however, partakes of feeling and thought at the same time: "Language is an organism which, in the multiplicity of its development, is thought, but in the unity which animates that thought is feeling."[57] The language of a poem can be considered either from a purely philological (lexical, grammatical) or from a strictly esthetic point of view; those who confine themselves exclusively to the study of the philological aspect (the multiplicity of elements through which the *act of thinking* constructs itself) will miss the center and soul of the poem; those who confine themselves exclusively to the subjective, esthetic aspect of the language (the unity of feeling pervading and holding together the whole) will not be able to grasp the concreteness of the work of art. The life of language is one with the life of the spirit, proceeding from the unity of feeling to the multiplicity of thought, from the impulse to think and say to the images and thoughts which form the whole of the discourse. The following passage seems to sum up clearly Gentile's idea on the matter:

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[56] Page 178 below.

[57] Page 179 below.

In a certain sense, we may say that language consists in the accent, in the accent that gives meaning to the words, in the tone which, as we say, makes the music. Depending on the accent with which we speak, the same words can have opposite meanings, and admiration may turn into irony, or threatening commands into suppliant prayers. The accent is the speaker's feeling; it is an accent which has one sound in the most different languages that have been formed in the historical development of the human spirit, and which is understood by all men because it is the feeling of humanity, regardless of nation or time. It is the desperate cry of Sappho's passion, which resounds throughout the centuries, and to which all human ears listen, despite the difficulties of the language. This accent of the spoken word is the same feeling imprinted in the glance and expression of a painted or sculpted face. But to look for this feeling (accent, tone, expression) outside the elements in which it is realized would evidently be to grasp at a shadow. One would look for that feeling, prior to thought, which is really nothing. The accent is in discourse and belongs to discourse. Expression belongs to the eyes, but insofar as the eyes are on a face. . . . Language is, therefore, both feeling and thought. It is thought insofar as it is feeling, and feeling insofar as it is thought; it is a unity which contains in itself a multiplicity.[58]

The treatment of the problem of technique follows the same logic as the treatment of language—a logic rigorously imposed by Gentile's system. What is technique and what is its relation to art? Gentile's views can be sufficiently illustrated by contrasting them with those of Croce. Technique is for Croce completely extrinsic to the creative process, because such a process ends with the intuition-expression. When the poet or artist has molded the image of his object in his own mind, the esthetic act is concluded. He now needs skill and tools, such as ability to write, ink, pens, colors, chisels, and brushes, to externalize his work, to put his poem on paper, or to sculpt his image in marble; but externalization, for which a technique is required, belongs to practical rather than esthetic activity. The book or the statue is made for practical purposes. Technique is, therefore, a body of knowledge and skills absolutely foreign to the esthetic process. Since technique is a conscious activity in which every word, every line, every touch of color is controlled and weighed, it could find no appropriate place within the esthetic process which develops in a sphere of innocence similar to dreaming. The exclusion of technique from the purely creative moment led critics to define Croce's theory as the esthetics of the "unpainted picture" (*quadro non dipinto*).

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[58] Pages 184–185 below. See also *Sommario di pedagogia*, vol. I, part I, chap. 9.

Gentile, on the contrary, by placing the concretization of art in the sphere of self-consciousness, sees in the creative act the awareness of the technical means through which the work is realized—colors, words, lines. For him technique does not externalize art, since everything is in the spirit and there is nothing to be externalized. But technique, which he defines as "bodies of knowledge that the artist needs in order to give concrete form to the images and concepts of his mind," constitutes the prescience of the artist and is an intrinsic part of his personality.[59] In its abstractness, technique is an antecedent of art; but in the work of art it is absorbed and assimilated into the very order of esthetic activity. Art cannot be separated from the medium in which it realizes itself. Every artist conceives his world in terms of the technical means of realization at his disposal. Technique is one of the instruments of the creative process: "The so-called externalization of a work of art is but the internal completion of the work itself by virtue of the subject's reaching a certain stage in the development of its own nature, which is one with the subject and not external to it."[60] Technique encompasses all the means used by the artist to bring the creative process from its potentiality to its actuality, from its abstract position to its concrete realization, from the unreality of pure feeling to the reality of the work of art. These technical elements comprise not only knowledge and skills, colors, marble, brushes, ink, pens, but the very body of the artist: the hand for the sculptor, the pianist, the painter; the voice for the singer; the limbs for the dancer. But for these elements to become an integral part of the life of the artist they must be at the center of his personality and be, therefore, pervaded by his feeling.

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[59] Page 185 below.

[60] Page 189 below.

Gentile goes so far as to identify language and content with technique: "Every man acts according to what he is . . . ; and he is what he is as a result of his past life, of his past thoughts, of his knowledge and the language he has acquired, all of which have become, so to speak, blood of his blood, flesh of his flesh."[61] Since the personality develops through thinking, and the language is created by the very *act of thinking* (without language thought would be impossible), language, which enhances subjectivity in its development, is but technique assimilated in the constitution of the subject. The same holds true of content:

> Content is the whole thought, the entire process developing in our mind through the creation of the work of art; it is that which stands before us as an object when we become aware of the work. It is both thought and words, for thought is in words; it is thought and sounds and lines and colors, etc. Content is therefore also something equivalent to technique, though generally appearing to be the opposite. And the whole is absorbed by the subject and transformed into pure feeling.[62]

However, while recognizing the esthetic nature of technique in the creative process of the work of art, Gentile stresses that art must not be confused with technique and that one must not fall into the naïve illusion that, in order to be a poet or a painter, it would be enough to study metrics or perspective. This misconception would lower art to the level of an ordinary mechanism and distort the esthetic value of technique, for technique, in order to preserve its esthetic function, must draw its life from the artist's feeling, must be the creative instrument of this feeling.

The problem of technique leads to that of the distinction of the arts (poetry, painting, music, etc.) and to the concept of literary genres which had so much influence throughout the centuries in the elaboration of literary theories and in criticism. Here again a reference to Croce may help to clarify Gentile's thought. For Croce the distinction between the various arts, and the theory on the nature and limits of each of them, are based only on the technique of externalization which he considers to be extrinsic to the esthetic process. Externalization is the process of physical production of the work of art and begins where the esthetic creation ends. The esthetic intuition is one and the same for the poet, the painter, the musician; the instruments of material realization vary. The difference in the means of externalization created the distinction between the various arts—a distinction which is to be considered purely empirical, just as one must consider empirical the precepts and rules constantly formulated for each art. The distinctions between the arts, therefore, have for Croce no meaning from the purely esthetic point of view. Croce treats the problem of literary genres in a similar way. The concept of "genre" is for him absolutely arbitrary, for esthetic creation does not yield to generalizations. In esthetics there are individual works and they cannot be subjected to general rules. Each great work of art is a new and original expression of its author who obeys no external precepts of any sort except his own inner creative impulses: "Since every work of art expresses a state of mind, and the state of mind is individual and always new, intuition implies infinite intuitions which cannot be brought into a narrow classification by genres."[63] The classification of works of art as "tragedy," "comedy," "epic," "novel," and so on, is again based on extrinsic elements—the technique of their physical production. While denying the literary genres any theoretical justification and pointing out the deleterious effects they had in literary criticism over the centuries, Croce recognizes their practical usefulness, especially for didactic purposes. They offer the student of literature groups of works under general labels which help memorization and identification of single works. They are useful to the librarian who has to classify books and arrange them on shelves according to subject or other designations.

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[61] Page 188 below.

[62] Page 190 below.

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[63] *Nuovi saggi*, 4th ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1958), p. 47.

Gentile's disagreement with Croce on the distinction of the arts and on the literary genres is the logical outcome of his own conception of technique. Having shown that technique is inherent in art, Gentile asserts that there is nothing arbitrary about literary genres, for they are the conceptualization of historical experiences which have become part of the personality of the poet or artist and operate as inner elements, ideal forms illuminating the concrete act of creation. Every new acquisition enriches and enhances the subject. Categories are not the object of thinking but functions of the subject in its thinking. They do not exist *a priori;* they are derived from experience; but once formed, they become part of the constitution of the subject:

> Although the technique of a literary "kind" is irrelevant to the esthetic essence of works of art and amounts to a mere pre-condition of art, in which it is absorbed, this does not imply that technique is not reflected in art or that it does not give a particular individuality to feeling. Feeling mirrors itself in technique and makes its own content out of its pre-conditions in the very act of objectifying itself and thus giving rise to the so-called work of art. Nor can technique, which is thought, remain a mere extrinsic appendage, for the reality of feeling is to be found only in the synthesis in which feeling is reflected in the body of thought, that is, in its technique.[64]

A similar principle applies to the distinction being made between the arts. Since technique is the instrument of the activity of the subject in its process of self-realization in the work of art, one may conclude that the multiplicity and diversity of the arts correspond to the multiplicity and diversity of the techniques through which subjectivity realizes itself. While art in its abstract nature (pure feeling) is one, the forms in which it realizes itself in works of art are many and vary according to the technical means employed for the purpose. The work of art is its technique; hence the distinction between the arts—a distinction which is not empirical but esthetic, since it is based on a conception of technique as preceding rather than following the creative activity of the subject.

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[64] Pages 197–198 below.

The concept of literary criticism derived from Gentile's doctrine has definite romantic overtones. Criticism corresponds to the process of actualization through which one discovers the *art* of a work of art, that is, beauty, which is feeling—the genetic principle of artistic creation. This process develops in three successive steps which bring about the re-enactment, in reverse, of the entire creative act—from the multiplicity of the expressive means (the actual work of art) to the unity of artistic inspiration (the subjectivity of the artist), from the words to the feeling which inspired them. The first moment is characterized by the analysis and evaluation of the content—thought, language, and other technical devices. The study of content is simply the history of the esthetic antecedents of the work of art, and a preparation for the critical judgment—a preparation which opens the way to the creative source, where the content was taken on by the subjectivity of the artist. When the critic reaches and grasps the creative principle, that is, the pure subjectivity embodied in the content, the second step begins. The critic has reached the beauty of the work and shares that state of grace which the artist experienced in his creative moment. The world of the poet becomes the world of the critic; the content is assimilated and forgotten, and the critic feels the esthetic enjoyment springing from his direct contact with the infinite world of the artist. The critic thus identifies himself with the artist by re-enacting the creative process. The third moment of the act of criticism is one of reconstruction. The critic reconstructs the work by a new exposition of its content. In this, the work of art comes to life again in the mind of the critic and, permeated by its feelings, unfolds its content in the moving form and rhythm of an exact re-creation. The critic is the *artifex additus artifici.*

Croce's method follows more or less the same steps, although the aims are quite different. Through the interpretation of the content the critic must go back to the source of inspiration and re-enact the creative process in his own mind. This demands in the critic an esthetic sensibility akin to that of the artist. But the interpretation of the content and the re-creation of the conditions which gave birth to the work of art are not yet criticism. These two steps only lead the critic to the conclusion that there is a work before him on which a critical judgment is to be expressed. This judgment must determine whether the work is or is not a work of art. For Croce art and beauty are identical; ugliness is non-art. While for Gentile beauty is feeling—the essence of subjectivity—for Croce it is the perfection of the intuition-expression, that is, of the poetic image. His critical judgment, therefore, consists in distinguishing, in a given work, what is art from what is not art, what is perfect expression from what is not. The critical judgment arises from the question "whether and to what extent the work, which stands as our problem, is intuition, that is, real as such, and whether and to what extent it is otherwise, that is, unreal: reality and unreality being beauty and ugliness in art, truth and error in logic, gain and loss in economics, good and evil in ethics."[65] For Croce criticism is judgment, "and judgment implies a criterion of judgment, the criterion of judgment the thinking of a concept, the thinking of a concept the relation with other concepts, and the relation with other concepts a system or philosophy."[66] Criticism and philosophy coincide. The good critic is a *philosophus additus artifici* rather than an *artifex additus artifici*, as Gentile would have it.

A problem closely related to the conception of language as well as to the conception of criticism is the problem of the *translation* of a work of art. Croce firmly held that a work of art is by its own nature untranslatable. Since it is the personal expression of its author, it cannot be reproduced or repeated in any way. If the words are the words of a particular feeling, the substitution of words entails the substitution of feelings. Consequently, translation gives a different work, perhaps the work of the translator.

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[65] *Nuovi saggi*, 4th ed., p. 79.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

For Gentile this is not so. In the translation we do not lose the work of art, but we re-create it in our mind, we actualize it. Each time we read a book, we translate it to ourselves. Art lives in the mind of the reader where the poem is re-created. The work of art expresses the world of the artist in its constant actualization, in its self-realization; but once the work is completed, it falls into pure objectivity. In rereading it we give it new life in our mind; it becomes the world of our spirit in its reality. Translation is immanent in every work of art; without the possibility of translating or reading, it would be dead forever. Translation is possible because art lives in the words, ever new, which actualize it. The language in which art is re-created is always new; it exists on condition that it transform itself continually to express the life of the mind in its constant self-realization, in its perennial rebirth. The life of a work of art is therefore in the act of thinking it, of translating it with new words from our own minds.[67]

Another important issue touched upon by Gentile is that of the history of art. The nature of his esthetics here again leads him to run against Croce's theory. Is the history of art possible from a purely esthetic point of view? Croce's answer is definitely affirmative on condition that such a history takes the form of a monograph tracing "the characteristic of the single artist and his works."[68] A general history of art is conceived by him as a series of monographs on single writers, painters, and so on. Croce repudiates general histories of art which group writers or painters by schools, styles, or nationality and link them to their predecessors and successors in the general development of the history of civilization. These are simply histories of culture and not of art, for they deal only with extraesthetic elements of the works of art. Art has no general history, for it is the expression of the absolute individuality of the writer. Works of art show neither progress nor relations with other works of art in their intrinsic nature. They are enclosed worlds whose history is the inner development of the single artist as an isolated personality living and growing within his own creation. Every masterpiece is a miracle with no links to previous miracles of the same sort. For Gentile, on the contrary, the history of art as pure art is absolutely inconceivable, since art exists only in the actuality of thought. The history of art is, therefore, the history of the content (thought) in which art realizes itself. In this sense, a history of art tracing the connective elements between works is both possible and legitimate. The true history of art (art in its concrete existence) is the history of thought emphasizing the feeling which pervades and animates the process of the spirit. In Gentile's judgment, the history of art as conceived by Croce lacks unity: it is broken up into an infinite number of individual artists living within the closed world of their works. There is Dante, Ariosto, Leopardi, rather than Italian literature; there is Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, rather than sixteenth-century painting; for the elements linking men and works in a general artistic movement are considered by Croce to be foreign to the intrinsic nature of art. On the other hand, Gentile's conception of the history of art seems to be a return to romantic cultural history constantly taken to task by Croce.

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[67] See pages 216–219 below, and the article "Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni," collected in *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1921), pp. 269–275. See also Croce's observations in *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. IV, 2nd ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1951), pp. 308–309.

[68] *Nuovi saggi*, p. 173.

The problem of art and morality could not be avoided in a philosophical system encompassing the whole of man's activities, theoretical and practical, and their immanent interrelationships. Gentile's and Croce's views on the matter, however, seem to coincide: the moral world of the artist, which is in a sense the whole spiritual world, is the foundation of his art. But Croce came to this realization as a result of his gradual acceptance of the principle of unity in spiritual life postulated by "actual idealism." Morality belongs to the world of volition and action, to the world of the "practical." As long as the practical activity of the spirit is "distinct" from its theoretical activity to which art belongs, morality and art remain completely separated within their own "distinct" domain. Croce, in fact, in his early definitions of art, excludes morality as a requirement for artistic creation. He theorized that art was the intuition of the "individual" and was required to be the expression of a "personality," not necessarily a *moral personality*, "but simply a soul—cheerful or sad, enthusiastic or disheartened, sentimental or sarcastic, benevolent or malevolent."[69] But with his essays "Il carattere di totalità dell'espressione artistica" (1917), and "L'arte come creazione e la creazione come fare" (1918),[70] Croce moved toward Gentile's position, that is, toward the identification of the theoretical and the practical in the unity and totality of the spirit. The moral world, in which the life of the spirit culminates, touches the esthetic world; the end and the beginning of the circular process of the spirit are soldered; the moral world becomes the subject matter of an ever-new esthetic intuition. Thus the moral world of the poet vibrates in his poem. Croce explicitly arrived at this conclusion in his *Estetica in nuce* (1928) where he states that "The foundation of all poetry is the human personality, and since the human personality completes itself in morality, the foundation of all poetry is the moral conscience."[71] By this Croce does not mean that the artist must be a man of impeccable conduct or a hero, but that he must be capable of fully living the human drama:

> He may sin and soil the purity of his soul and become culprit as a practical man; but he must deeply feel, in one form or another, the sense of purity and impurity, rightfulness and wrongfulness, good and evil. He may lack great courage in practical life or even show signs of disheartenment and fear, but he must feel the dignity of courage. Often artistic inspiration springs not from what the artist is as a man, but from what he feels he ought to be.[72]

Of course, moral personality is not enough to be a poet. Art requires genius; without genius all the rest would be like a pile of firewood which cannot be made to burn. On the other hand, the figure of the pure poet, of the cultivator of pure beauty, of the poet bereft of humanity, is not the figure of a poet but a caricature, for poetry presupposes all the other forms of spiritual activity and is, at the same time, presupposed by them.[73]

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[69] "L'intuizione e il carattere lirico dell'arte," *Problemi di estetica*, 4th ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1949), p. 18.

[70] The two essays were collected in *Nuovi saggi di estetica* in 1920.

[71] See *Ultimi saggi*, 2nd ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1948), p. 10.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

In Gentile's philosophy, in which the theoretical and the practical, intellect and will, knowing and doing, perfectly coincide in the unity of the spiritual synthesis, the relation between art and morality appears sufficiently clear from the definition of morality. In the life of the spirit the practical world is one and the same as the theoretical world; morality is, therefore, intrinsic in the self-creative process of the spirit. And self-creation means moral responsibility, or freedom; consequently:

> Every aspect of conscious life is subject to moral law; there is no corner of the earth, no moment of the day in which man can escape from the imperious voice of duty. He cannot escape from the moral world that surrounds him on every side by taking refuge in the free world of abstract speculation or of his own imagination, for the care that makes the poet "lean through the long years" [Per più anni macro (Dante, *Paradiso*, XXV, 3)] is a torturing passion that compels him to strive after perfection in his art, and the rigorous logic of speculative thought is a more severe constraint upon the seeker after truth than any law of the State. Within the soul of man there is a still small voice that is never silent, and will not let him rest but spurs him ever onward. Onward toward what? Toward himself—toward the ideal self that he ought to be.[74]

The constructive process of spiritual reality is a moral process. Philosophy, therefore, coincides with morality. And since art in its concreteness is philosophy, that is, synthesis, it is also morality. But art is not an instrument of moral edification, for it cannot have an extrinsic end: "It is impossible to conceive of a spiritual activity which does not have its end within itself."[75] The ethical character of art is immanent in the spiritual process:

> From the point of view peculiar to art, art, in its autonomy as spirit, is the whole spirit, that is, philosophy and therefore morality. All this

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[73] See *ibid.*, p. 11.

[74] *Genesis and Structure of Society*, 75.

[75] Page 249 below.

> implies that the artist has his own duties just as does the man who thinks and acts—duties not to the world but to his own world, to the world of art. . . . False art is esthetically false because it is morally false.[76]

Because of its immanent ethical character, art has always been considered to be "the great educator of mankind," and false art has always been considered to be a corruptor "because one-sided and partial as compared to true art which is always a spiritual whole."[77] Ugliness cannot be but "the expression of feelings in which man was unable to put his whole self: in other words, superficial feelings, not deeply felt."[78] The artist, as well as other men, must obey the law of the spirit, which is self-creation, freedom, and therefore responsibility and morality:

> Manzoni, for example, does not intrude his own moral scruples into his art, but he cannot keep art and morality really separated; he feels that morality is immanent in art and vital to its existence. For art cannot exist unless it is inspired by the supreme law of the life of the spirit.[79]

The conception of genius is closely related to that of taste in Gentile's and Croce's esthetic theories. Genius and taste are, in fact, identified. The traditional distinction between a creative faculty (genius) and a judging faculty (taste) seemed to them to have no foundation. The creative genius is not a blind and uncontrolled force, but a conscious activity guided by inner norms. Although these norms are beyond scientific analysis, their presence cannot be denied. Artistic creation requires the concomitant effort of genius and taste—two elements which, in the creative act, are the very same thing. Taste is but genius in action. There can be no genius without taste, for taste is its essential characteristic. "Taste," writes Gentile, "is genius itself in its dialectic."[80] Taste cannot appear after the work of art, outside the spirit of the artist, for it is part of the constructive process of such a work; it is judgment which is, at the same time, perception and evaluation. The identification of genius and taste would imply that both artist and critic must be endowed, in varying degrees, with the same faculties: the critic who judges must possess a certain amount of artistic genius, and the artist who creates must be endowed with a certain amount of artistic taste.

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[76] Page 252 below.

[77] Page 252 below.

[78] Page 252 below.

[79] *Genesis and Structure of Society*, p. 76.

[80] Page 216 below.

But what is genius? Here Gentile and Croce seem to differ considerably. The old question whether genius is a natural gift or the result of study, whether genius is an intuitive or a rational power, whether the word genius applies to artists only or to philosophers, scientists, and men of action as well, receives from them conflicting answers. For Croce the distinction between nature and art, natural gift and study, is baseless, for the two elements are not separable. To conceive of genius without study is to conceive of a reality without a concrete development. Since reality is development, genius without education (that is, development) is not genius. True genius demands the development intrinsic in its own nature. It is therefore inaccurate to suggest that someone has genius but no culture (or conversely), for those who have a great genius must possess the culture which promoted its development. Genius without education is not true genius.[81] Since in Croce's philosophy there are four spiritual activities, each representing a particular synthesis in the life of the spirit, there are also four types of genius:

> If the forms of human activity are four, four also are the forms of genius. Men endowed with genius in art, in science, in moral will or heroes, have been recognized. But the genius purely in economics has met with repugnance. It is not altogether without reason that a category of bad geniuses or of *geniuses of evil* has been created.[82]

But whatever distaste one may have for purely economic genius, there is no reason for not granting it the qualification of genius.

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[81] *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. I, p. 72.

[82] *Aesthetic*. Translated by Douglas Ainslie, 11th ed. (New York: Noonday Press, 1966), p. 61.

The difference between the genius (of whatever kind) and the common man is only quantitative, not qualitative. If the faculty of genius were qualitatively different from that of the ordinary man, communication would be impossible. The genius is endowed with more spiritual power than the common man; but this power is human and not divine and therefore of the same essential nature in all men. The romantic conception of the artistic genius as something superhuman led to the cult of genius, but also to the ridiculing of it. Those who saw in the artistic genius an unconscious force, lowered him below humanity, making him a blind mechanism. For the artistic genius is always conscious; he may lack reflective consciousness, but not intuitive consciousness.[83]

While Croce's conception of genius is somewhat antiromantic, Gentile's is tinged with romantic colors. For Croce, genius implies natural gift and education—two inseparable elements which form one reality; for Gentile, genius is nature, that *vis interna naturae* whose creative power is infinite. Genius is not thought, learning, science, philosophy; nor is it a revelation, for revelation subjects man to a presupposed reality, thus suppressing his subjectivity. Genius is the very power of nature which requires no school, no rule, no study to express itself. It is so subjective that nothing can be added to it and nothing can be subtracted from it. It is the very power of the individual personality and it cannot be transmitted or taught. Gentile seems to concur with Croce that genius belongs to all men in varying degrees, since all men are animated by their subjective energy. It would be more appropriate to say, as Croce suggested, not *poeta nascitur* but *homo nascitur poeta.*[84] But for Gentile the word "genius" applies only to poets, for only poets enrich and extend the human world with their creative power. They continue the divine work. The other categories of geniuses are defined by Gentile as "ingenious men," whom he subtly distinguishes from the real genius. Although thinkers and men of

[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

action are honored and exalted, only the poetic genius is looked upon as a privileged spirit, as a divine power, and is loved by all men, for only the poetic genius is capable of giving the feeling of something fresh, youthful, deeply human: "The worlds of the thinker and the man of action are constructions. The world of the poet, on the contrary, is the very soul of the constructive principle."[85] While genius is synthesis and creativity, ingeniousness is analysis and abstract thought, theory without practice, pure intellectualism; the ingenious man considers himself as a spectator of the world in which he operates; he is interested only in knowing; he does not feel his subjectivity so deeply as to think that this world could not exist without him. Ingeniousness is clarity of thought, fine technique, erudition and doctrine, acumen, understanding of details, but not profoundity of thought, warmth of inspiration, power which elevates men to the vision of a superior world:

> Ingeniousness belongs to exegetes, genius to creators. The ingenious man does not aspire to originality, because for him things already exist and his task is to know and distinguish them perfectly. On the contrary, the genius does not know things which already exist, for he is longing for a world still to be born and which he will create. In his longing he neglects particulars, he has no eyes for the parts; he is intent upon the whole, the synthesis of elements, the living being. He is obscure because of his depth and gives as much matter for study to his commentators as nature does to its busy researchers.[86]

Ingeniousness is the source of the small virtues of science and life—necessary but futile when compared with the great faiths, the robust temper, the powerful humanity of genius, which creates the world where the small virtues exercise their beneficial action. "Ingeniousness is the mason, genius is the architect. Both are necessary."[87]

This outline of Gentile's esthetics is far from exhaustive. It is only meant to bring out the very essential features of a theory of art which is still to be tested in literary criticism. Most Italian literary critics did not find much appeal in Gentile's theory, owing particularly to its highly speculative nature. The author himself indicated in the preface to *La filosofia dell'arte* that his book was mainly for students of philosophy: "I made this clear also in the title page in order to warn the worthy literary critics of the daily press[88] that this book is not for them. . . . With all the respect I have for them I dare say that their esthetics is not philosophy, not even the philosophy of the four words."[89] But despite the rather abstract treatment of the matter, the book clearly sets forth an esthetic position which could be extremely fruitful in literary criticism, especially when dealing with such complex personalities as Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and others whose artistic achievements cannot be encompassed by Croce's definition of art as *expression of feeling*, whatever the broadness of this definition. Gentile's own approach to literary works, which shall be discussed in the following pages, may serve as an illustration of the strength and weakness of his esthetic theory.

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[85] Page 208 below.

[86] Page 214 below.

[87] Page 214 below.

Literary Criticism

Gentile's writings as a literary critic are not abundant; they cannot in any way compare in number and in range of interest with those of Croce. After the publication of *La filosofia dell'arte*, Gentile seldom concerned himself with literary criticism. His mature esthetics remained, therefore, for the most part, a theory whose validity has not yet been confirmed by applications on a large scale. Besides the few essays on Dante and Leopardi, collected in the volume *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura*,[90] the following books of literary criticism must be mentioned: *Dante e Manzoni* (1932),[91] *L'eredità di Vittorio Alfieri* (1926),[92] *Manzoni e Leopardi* (1928),[93] *Poesia e filosofia di Giacomo Leopardi* (1939),[94] *Studi su Dante* (1965).[95] In addition, a number of his literary essays are found in works devoted to philosophical problems or to the history of thought.[96]

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[88] The Italian reads: "critici della terza pagina." The third page of Italian dailies has traditionally been devoted to feature stories and literary criticism.

[89] Stricture aimed at Croce's philosophy. The four words indicate the four forms of spiritual activity as distinguished by Croce. See note 37 and p. 288 below.

[90] The volume contains the following literary essays: "Pensiero e poesia nella *Divina commedia*," "La profezia di Dante," "La filosofia del Leo-

Gentile's literary preferences are restricted to a small number of poet-philosophers or poet-prophets of Italian literature: Dante, Campanella, Alfieri, Manzoni, Leopardi. Gentile's admiration for Tommaso Campanella's *Poesie*, which he edited, is a clear indication of his attitude toward poetry. Campanella's poems are

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pardi," "Una storia del pensiero di Giacomo Leopardi," "Leopardi maestro di vita," "Prosa e poesia in Giacomo Leopardi."

[91] The volume contains: "La filosofia di Dante," "La profezia di Dante," and an essay on Manzoni.

[92] The volume contains essays published in *La critica* in 1921 and 1922. Most of them have a historical rather than a literary interest. The second edition of the volume (*Opere complete*, vol. XVII, 1964) includes an additional essay, "Vittorio Alfieri uomo," which had appeared in 1942.

[93] There is in the volume only one essay on Manzoni—the same one published in *Dante e Manzoni.* The part concerning Leopardi contains the four studies, which had appeared in *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura*, and other pieces.

[94] It contains two lectures one given in 1937, the other in 1938. The volume *Manzoni e Leopardi* (vol. XXIV of *Opere complete*) contains eight studies on Leopardi, including those already mentioned.

[95] The book (vol. XIII, *Opere complete*) collects all that Gentile had written on Dante. This amounts to five studies, four of which had already appeared in other volumes. The first study was published in 1905, the last in 1939. Following are the titles: "Dante nella storia del pensiero italiano," "Pensiero e poesia nella *Divina commedia*," "La profezia di Dante," "La filosofia di Dante," "Il canto di Sordello."

[96] His *Storia della filosofia italiana fino a Lorenzo Valla* (*Opere complete*, vol. XI, 1962) contains a chapter on Dante (pp. 137–184), one on Petrarch (pp. 216–253) and a discussion on Iacopone da Todi (pp. 121–135). In *Problemi della scolastica* (*Opere complete*, vol. XII, 1963) he touches upon Dante, Petrarch, and others. In *Il pensiero italiano del rinascimento* (*Opere complete*, vols. XIV–XV) literature and art are frequently dealt with. The second edition of the volume *Il modernismo* (*Opere complete*, vol. XXXV) contains an article on Antonio Fogazzaro (pp. 147–156), written in 1920 as a review of Tommaso Gallarati-Scotti's book *La vita di Antonio Fogazzaro.*

"philosophical" and of little or no interest as poetry; they are intellectual lucubrations, thought in verse form, springing from cerebralism rather than real poetic inspiration; and even when there is some inspiration, it is so overwhelmed by philosophical and moral considerations that the entire creative process becomes intellectualized. But Gentile sees in the philosophical passion of Campanella not only the philosopher but also the poet. In the chapter on Campanella in his *Il pensiero italiano del rinascimento* Gentile frequently quotes from the poems in order to explain the philosopher's thought. His main objective in literary criticism is in fact to elucidate the philosophy of his authors and to study the relationship between thought and poetry. Since a work of art in its concrete existence is thought (self-consciousness), and since feeling (subjectivity) is immanent in thought, Gentile considers it futile to try to isolate the one from the other: in their isolation they are two abstractions and not a living reality. A work of art expresses the totality of life, and any distinction in that totality becomes a mutilation. Croce's distinction between art and thought, poetry and non-poetry, the expression of feeling and the expression of concepts is for Gentile completely unwarranted. There is no poet who is not also a thinker; the spirit cannot produce anything outside the total rhythm of its dialectics. The classification of the products of the spirit in distinct categories—works of art and works of thought, works of prose and works of poetry—is inconsistent with the living unity of the spirit. And Gentile pointedly asks:

> To which category do novels belong? And Leopardi's *Dialogues?* And Plato's *Dialogues*, at least those most admired for liveliness of characterization and splendor of form? Are writers like Dante and Goethe poets only or are they also thinkers, philosophers? Can we not speak of the philosophy of Leopardi or of Petrarch, because they appear in the history of literature as poets? Is there not in the *Divine Comedy* an evident practical, religious, political aim? In the face of these questions either the obvious facts are denied as a matter of principle, or a third category must be added to the two previous ones, the category

of poet-philosopher or artist-philosopher like Leonardo, and a third literary type, that of poetic prose.[97]

Since feeling and thought cannot be considered separately in a work of art, one should have to determine the intensity of feeling pervading the dialectical process of the spirit which results in the work of art, for art is not thought, but the feeling of thought.

Although Gentile emphasizes the lyrical nature of art, that is, the feeling permeating a certain thought, his marked inclination toward a poetry fostered by reflection often leads him to focus attention on the philosophy of a writer and to deal rather generically with specific artistic qualities in a given work. He sees in art not an alogical activity productive of beautiful images, a pure emotional experience, but an activity which encompasses the whole life of the spirit—feeling and intellect. Experience proves, he says, that in all great poets there is a philosophy, a thought, however unsystematic, which is enlivened by poetry. Dante is one of the most outstanding examples; many others could be added—Lucretius, Virgil, Goethe, and so on. The problem, therefore, is to examine the intrinsic relation between poetry and philosophy, rather than to exclude philosophy from art and to relegate the former to a different sphere of the spirit.

In the case of Dante, Gentile perhaps exaggerates the philosophical content of the *Divine Comedy*, submerging poetry in the philosophical structure of the work, where poetry, being fused in the whole body of the poem, is no longer discernible. He emphasizes that poetry is not the expression of barbarity, of the infancy of mankind, as asserted by Vico, nor an alogical activity, but that it springs from a philosophical conception which involves all the activities of the spirit. The relation poetry-structure should be inverted to structure-poetry, structure being the total intellectual experience which converges to the creation of the poem:

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[97] Page 168 below.

> The *Divine Comedy* is a poetic as well as a philosophical work . . . since in it the general concept of the universe is . . . the very essence of the general structure of the poem. In Dante philosophy is not the particular, the accessory, but the general, the whole, the principal. And this is the difference between Dante and the pure poets, each of whom usually has a philosophy, but only as an antecedent of his work, as a latent and unconscious inspirer. The critic will be able to discover it, but the poet has forgotten it. Dante, on the contrary, never forgets his concept; he veils it through the allegory, but he never hides it either from himself or from his reader. He keeps his eyes constantly fixed on this concept; and if at times he is overcome by passion and lives with the creatures of his imagination the unreflective life of the world, on which the philosopher meditates, the general aim of the poem soon shakes him, recalls him to that concept, and prods him to move on in his ideal superworldly construction which leads man from the earthly dark forest . . . to the great light of God's thought.[98]

The *Divine Comedy* has the form of a vision, but it is a meditation in which the poet unfolds and clarifies the sense of life. One cannot say that philosophy hinders poetry. The first and the last word of the poem are the point of departure (man's conscience dominated by passions) and the point of arrival (God) of a process—the philosophical process of the spirit whose progression is marked by reflective steps.

In his early critical essays Gentile seems to be anchored to Hegelianism, although he is striving to overcome the Hegelian position, according to which poetry is an inferior and imperfect phase of knowledge as compared to philosophy. Dante, Gentile maintains, "is a poet because he is unable to be entirely what he meant to be—a teacher of truth." When necessary, he sacrifices even his art to truth: "The doctrine hidden under the veil of the verse is for him the essential of his work; and when it becomes necessary to remove the veil, he does not hesitate to put into verse his prosaic science."[99] Dante is a greater poet than philosopher in the *Divine Comedy*, though he meant to be a greater philosopher than poet. Philosophy and science became his ambition after the death of Beatrice, for whom he had written his love poems. This is clearly shown by the *Convivio*. From pure poetry Dante turns to science and philosophy. Love poetry appears to him to be unbecoming to his age, knowledge, and fame. "Dante will not disdain poetry; but his poetry will be one of serious teaching and of truth—Virgil's poetry. In other words, Dante feels that he can still avail himself of poetry, but for teaching truth; poetry may be the dress, the substance being philosophy."[100] The *Divine Comedy* was meant to be, primarily, a philosophical system, perhaps a *Summa theologica*, but Dante could not divest himself completely of the human and the temporal. He could not always reach the world of pure truth toward which he tended. Often his effort to overcome the world of human passions proved to be vain and he dwelt in the domain of poetry.

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[98] *Storia della filosofia italiana fino a Lorenzo Valla* (*Opere complete*, vol. XI, 1962), p. 137.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Gentile presents Dante as a complete personality in which at times the poet prevails, at other times, the philosopher. The philosopher prevails when the subjectivity of the writer overcomes itself and acquires rational life, self-consciousness; the poet, when subjectivity remains below that high rationality which constitutes philosophy. Gentile seems to undermine precisely what Croce considers the greatest glory of Dante—his poetry. Dante, in Gentile's interpretation, is a poet when he cannot be a philosopher and the teacher of truth that he intended to be.

Although Gentile cannot easily dismiss Croce's view that the poem is philosophy in its general structure and poetry in some of its episodes, he strongly objects to Croce's distinctions. According to Croce the theological-political novel and poetry are two distinct things, and where philosophy prevails poetry vanishes. Gentile maintains, on the contrary, that poetry is philosophy itself colored by a particular feeling, that feeling which constitutes the subjectivity of the writer. Philosophy is the subject matter which the poet uses to build his own world.

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[100] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

There is no Dante, the poet, or Dante, the philosopher, but Dante, the poet-philosopher: poetry and philosophy being Dante's mind in its actual unity. Dante's poetry is immanent in his philosophy; it is not sheer imagination, but imagination fostered by thinking. It is in fact a philosophical concept, a new vision of the world, that gives fire to his poetical creativeness, and urges him on in his journey. Dante never loses sight of the general aim of his poem.

These ideas are reiterated by Gentile in 1908 in his review of Karl Vossler's *Die Göttliche Komödie* (vol. I, 1907). He praises the German critic for his brilliant presentation of the religious and philosophical genesis of the *Divine Comedy* and for his relentless effort to grasp Dante's spirit and personality through the development of the religious symbols and the philosophical knowledge from the most remote antiquity. But he strongly disapproves of Vossler's marked distinction between rationality and religiosity, philosophy and mysticism, which break the speculative unity of Dante's spirit. Since in Vossler's interpretation the duality of the philosopher and the mystic is brought to unity by the poet, Gentile considers this solution purely external and therefore unacceptable, for it is achieved through a *tertium quid* (poetry) instead of being intrinsic in the dialectical process. In the concreteness of Dante's spirit everything is fused; religion is philosophy and philosophy is art, an art which dissolves in the fire of imagination the vision of the universe, nature, and man—man with all of his vital passions, from sensual love to divine love, and with all forms of knowledge, from the description of things sensible to the speculation of transcendental reality. Vossler, in tracing the prehistory of the *Divine Comedy*, the religious and philosophical antecedents from which the poem springs, treated religion and philosophy as two historical entities in the spirit of Dante—entities unified by art; for Gentile, science and faith, philosophy and religion are only abstractions in their separation and not historical realities. The only reality is the synthesis of these abstract elements, which is immanent in them. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is, indeed, the result of the religious and philosophical movement which preceded it, and in order to trace its genesis and its growth one must start with the poem, where all the contradictions find harmony, and from there reconstruct Dante's spirit—a reconstruction *a posteriori.* No one could understand Dante without studying the cultural antecedents of his work. But Gentile, while stressing the importance of such studies for the comprehension of the poem as a whole, objects to Vossler's separate treatment of the religious genesis and the philosophical genesis.

Reviewing the second volume of *Die Göttliche Komödie* in 1912, Gentile clarifies his position further. The first volume had dealt with the intellectual prehistory of the *Divine Comedy;* the second dealt specifically with the esthetic spirit which molded the vast matter of the poem. Vossler's esthetic approach, Gentile maintains, while resuming the tradition established by De Sanctis, repeats the very same mistakes of the great critic, for it assigns a higher esthetic value to the parts of the poem which display a greater freedom of imagination, regarding the doctrinal elements as disruptive to the flow of Dante's creative spirit. The whole technical mechanism of the stage in which the poet puts his creatures, all the scientific parts, thus become the lifeless elements of the *Divine Comedy.* If this should be the principle for the interpretation and evaluation of poetry, argues Gentile, a good part of the poem would be obliterated. How can one draw a precise line between the real creatures of Dante's imagination, living their own life, and the shadows of theological and philosophical concepts?

> It is impossible to say where faith, theology, science, the figurative sense, the work of the intellect end, and life, passion, the lively impetus of the personality, the concreteness of reality begin: for, all this is fused in one life in the imagination of Dante; here light is joy and life, because it breaks the darkness; and life is life insofar as it triumphs over death: the two terms have their reality in their inseparable unity.[101]

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[101] "Pensiero e poesia nella *Divina commedia,*" in *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1921), pp. 244–245. The essay com-

Gentile takes issue even with De Sanctis' view, according to which the *Inferno* has a minimum of philosophy and a maximum of poetry, and the *Paradiso* has a minimum of poetry and a maximum of philosophy. De Sanctis writes:

> It is like going from the individual to the species and from the species to the kind. The more one advances the more the individual loses its concreteness and becomes generalized. This certainly is Christian perfection, morality; but it is not artistic perfection. . . . In front of the door of *Purgatory* the devil disappears and the flesh dies, and with the flesh most of the poetry vanishes.[102]

In the *Paradiso* one witnesses the ultimate dissolution of form; imagination becomes a simple light and then dies.

De Sanctis, in Gentile's opinion, missed the high poetry that Dante infused in the intellectual elements of the work. Life or the flesh does not go with the devil, because life is not only the tumult of passions portrayed in the *Inferno*, but it is also contemplation—artistic, philosophical, religious—which the ideal of the *Purgatorio* represents; nor is the asceticism or mysticism of the *Paradiso* an abstract doctrine. Dante's poem, Gentile maintains, must be viewed in its intrinsic unity:

> It is not to say that in a work of art there should not be any intellectual elements. As a matter of fact, there is no work of art, and never can be, that is free of them. Only, the intellectual elements must not be valued as such, for their objective, logical truth, but rather as a lyrical aspiration of the artist. The question, then, is whether Dante permeates with his lyricism the theological and philosophical concepts which he advocates as a poet-philosopher in his *Comedy*, whether these concepts have become the very soul of the poet.[103]

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bines pages of an article published in *La critica*, IV (1908), pp. 52–71, and two others published in the *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, LIII (1909), 353–365, and LIX (1912), 385–393.

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 240 (quoted by Gentile).

[103] "Filosofia, religione e arte nella *Divina commedia.* A proposito d'un libro del Vossler," *La critica*, VI (1908), 69. Reprinted in *Il modernismo* (1909).

One cannot detach the *Inferno* from the other canticles, nor can one separate the passional center of Dante's being from the world of his scholastic culture, which is the very essence of his personality. Every dissection of his work destroys the life of his spirit, which is unity.

Gentile defends Dante's allegory against Vossler, who considers the most successful parts of the *Divine Comedy* to be those where the poet frees himself of the allegorical style of the Middle Ages. Dante's allegory is for Gentile the very poetic language of Dante, the expression of his spirit. Allegory is an esthetic error, a disruption of the poetic intuition, only when it is mechanically superimposed on the creative process, thus remaining outside its object. This is not the case in the *Divine Comedy*, where allegory is not an intruder but a precondition of art, a constitutive element of the personality of the artist.[104] In an article of 1920 he writes in reference to Dante: "Art can be justified only by allegory, for it must not serve as the expression of feeling, which is the individuality of the artist, but as an attractive presentation of the truth which constitutes the worth of religion and philosophy," and he further adds: "Precisely because art draws its worth from knowledge, poetry is allegorical; and being by its own nature the freest expression, nay, the celebration of the freedom of the spirit in its individuality, it immerses itself in the universality of learning."[105]

Gentile's main objections to Vossler's work were indicative of a marked tendency to fight distinctions in order to achieve the absolute unity of the spirit, which was the major concern of his budding "actual idealism." His article, "La filosofia di Dante," written in 1921, attests more clearly than his earlier writings his actualistic interpretation of the Poet. Previously Gentile seems to emphasize Dante's thought, the vast doctrine and the universal truths which form the architecture of the poem. In this study he stresses the subjective element animating the poet's thought and learning. Although he recognizes that feeling and thought cannot be conceived separately, he shifts emphasis rather freely. The thought of a poet can only be reached through the subjective element which allows us to penetrate to the source of that immortal life which is poetry, the poetry in which thought assumed its form. Philosophy, which constitutes the poetic personality and the center from where all passions irradiate to the vast world of the poem, is the source of the burning fire in which Dante fuses the immense matter gathered from life and history in order to shape his prophecy. And here again Gentile upholds the esthetic nature of Dante's allegory—this time against Croce's controversial book, *La poesia di Dante* (1921) which radically rejects allegorical language. For Croce allegory is not a poetic expression. Allegorical language is absolutely alien to poetry, for it has no relation to the esthetic intuition. Allegory is a sort of convention whereby the writer arbitrarily decides that a certain character, word, fact, or object, stands for something to which it is not intrinsically related. This "cryptography" is completely unintelligible unless the writer himself provides the key. Croce points out the inanity of critical works aimed at solving riddles and the tendency of some critics to multiply these riddles by seeing in the *Divine Comedy* something other than the poem. Allegory is a practical act, a decision of the will, and therefore a hindrance to poetry. When a writer sets up in advance an allegorical scheme, one of two things can result: either his intentions disappear in the flow of his imaginative process, and in this case there will be no allegory but the very poetic image; or his allegorical intentions remain as a mechanical addition completely extrinsic to the intuitive process, and in this case there will be allegory but no poetry. Allegory is either identified with poetry (and in this case it does not exist), or it is alien to poetry. "Allegory and poetry," wrote Croce later, "are like oil and water, two mental acts radically different and impossible to unify."[106]

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[104] See *ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

[105] *Pensiero italiano del rinascimento* (Forence: Sansoni, 1940), 3rd ed., pp. 23–24. The chapter from which the passage was taken had been published in 1920.

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[106] *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. V (Bari: Laterza, 1951), p. 104. See

For Gentile, on the contrary, Dante's allegory is the embodiment of his scholastic philosophy; it is an imaginative transfiguration of philosophical reasoning, a form of poetic language inherent in the whole architecture of the poem. Dante's philosophy, expressed by symbols, is the very substance of his poetry. Without those symbols, which are part of his language, Dante would not have been able to arrive at his concepts. His entire world is but his philosophy expressed in allegorical form. The artist thinks and actualizes his world through the technical means at his disposal. Allegory is an expressive word, a symbol, which represents the object prominently. It is impossible to understand Dante's thought and poetry when separated from the allegorical elements. Thus Gentile justifies the exegetical work aimed at clarifying Dante's symbols. Due to his mental habits, the poet could not have presented things differently, since allegory was for him a spontaneous way of conceiving and expressing. Allegory, as any other form or figure through which imagination presents its object, is esthetically legitimate, provided that (and here Gentile repeats the observation made in reference to Vossler) it observes the essential laws of form, that is, to be the very living form of the subject itself and not to remain outside its object.[107] Hence Croce's remark: "The law of allegory is precisely to be outside its object, that is, to be a second and therefore extrinsic meaning: allegory, in other words, is not *a form like any other form of imagination*, for if this were the case there would be no problem concerning it."[108]

Croce's criticism of Gentile's conception of allegory is directed to the whole of Gentile's philosophy:

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also *La poesia di Dante* (Bari: Laterza, 1952), pp. 14–17; *Nuovi saggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1958), pp. 332–338.

[107] See *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura*, pp. 244–245; *Dante e Manzoni* (Florence: Sansoni, 1923), pp. 79–80; *La critica*, VI (1908), 69–70; *Il pensiero italiano del rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1940), pp. 23–24.

[108] *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. V (Bari: Laterza, 1951), p. 8 (footnote).

Actual idealism posits logical thought as the only reality dissolving imagination, will and morality, esthetics, economics and ethics into the form of logical thought. While a consequence of this is panlogism, those who profess it show signs of disdain for logical distinctions (see the tone of religious exaltation which they give their style deliberately). Panlogism is blind to what makes poetry poetry, and practical activity practical activity. Gentile's studies on Leopardi and on Dante offer a proof. In the *Operette morali* he is not interested in what the poetic spirit is concerned with; he does not perceive the labor of a poem at times just sketched out, at times cooled by improper ratiocinative forms, but he busies himself to discover the design of the didactic exposition of a philosophical concept; and in Dante he sees the philosopher and the prophet, and he mistakes allegorism, which is convention and intellectualism, for a poetic form of expression—the allegorism which has been a wall for the critics of Dante the poet.[109]

This conflict of literary interpretation clearly reflects a philosophical conflict involving the principle of distinction and that of unity. Gentile strongly disagrees with Croce's distinction between thought and poetry in the *Divine Comedy* and his complete devaluation of Dante's doctrine, which constitutes the structure of the poem. Unable to deny that there is a philosophy in the *Divine Comedy*, the critics of the "fragment" (Croce), Gentile argues, assert that it is necessary to distinguish between poetry and philosophy, spontaneous creation and philosophical concepts, and conclude that where the philosopher is, the poet vanishes. The esthetics of form, he continues, does not consider an abstract form, separated from its content, but a form in which all the content of the work of art is fused. The world that the poet saw cannot be put aside as alien to the development of the process in which esthetic creation consists. The content embodies the personality of the poet, the vibrations of his soul from which the content receives life. The subject matter of art, abstractly conceived, comprises all the experiences accumulated in the human spirit throughout the centuries, including philosophical experiences; but this matter becomes poetry insofar as it is transformed into concrete life in the mind of the poet. Nor can any part of the *Divine Comedy* be detached as nonpoetic in itself. Any matter in itself is outside poetry, being outside the spirit and therefore outside reality. Nor can poetry be anything outside Dante's philosophy, his political, ethical, and religious thought. His philosophy is a dream, a vision, passion, and it cannot be understood outside the self which dreams and feels. Dante gathered from the schools of his time the matter of his thought, but he impressed upon it the seal of his powerful individuality, thus transforming philosophy into living thought—poetry.

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[109] *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. IV, p. 300.

Dante's personality as interpreted by Gentile is that of poet–seer. Gentile celebrates in him the prophet, the philosopher, the moralist, the man of action, rather than the poet *per se*. He seems to see the poet in the whole, as dissolved into all of his activities —intellective and practical. The poet is the passion and the soul which animate Dante's thought and actions. He is a poet insofar as he is a thinker, his poetry being his prophecy.

Gentile's studies on Leopardi, although stressing the relation between thought and poetry, are more closely related to the literary field. Leopardi is perhaps the only poet for whom Gentile felt a keen and long-lasting interest. This is attested to by the number of articles and discussions he devoted to the poet on various occasions during a period of about thirty years. These studies (the first in 1907, the last in 1938)[110] distinctly show the main phases of his critical approach—the Hegelian-Crocean and the actualistic. His first article, "La filosofia di Giacomo Leopardi,"[111] was prompted by Pasquale Gatti's book, *Esposizione del sistema filosofico di Giacomo Leopardi*,[112] which was meant to prove, through passages from Leopardi's diary, *Zibaldone*,[113] that the poet had a complete and coherent philosophical system. This would imply that Leopardi's poems were fostered by philosophy, and the thoughts jotted down in the *Zibaldone* were the first sketches of his poems. Gentile's article takes issue with the supposed unity of Leopardi's thought. Leopardi was a great poet, but not a philosopher. Gentile admits that "at the bottom of each human mind, especially the mind of great poets, the existence of a philosophy is incontestable," and that it is thus possible "to speak of the philosophy of Leopardi as well as of the philosophy of Manzoni, Ariosto, Shakespeare, Homer."[114] But he cautiously adds that "the philosophy of poets is not the philosophy of philosophers,"[115] since it is not a speculative system but thoughts, reflections, beliefs, which constitute the truth of the moment. Leopardi's philosophy is, in other words, an emotional state of mind. Whatever the poet says, he never reveals a philosophy proper, but he expresses a state of mind determined and colored by certain dominating thoughts, which become the subject matter of his poetry. Every poem and every prose work of Leopardi is a new mental situation, a new vision of the same tormenting thought. The system of a philosopher, on the contrary, generally remains outside the emotional life of its author. The feelings of the philosopher are swallowed by his philosophy, whereas the philosophy of the poet is swallowed by his feelings: "Thus, once we have in front of us a determined person in all the agitation of his life, at another time we have a system of concepts in and for themselves."[116] True philosophy contains nothing of the personal feelings of those who construct it. Philosophy is an absolute liberation from the limits of subjectivity; it is contemplation, so to speak, of an eternal truth, in which the philosopher, as an individual, forgets himself and his suffering.[117]

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[110] These studies are now collected in the volume *Manzoni e Leopardi*, *Opere complete*, vol. XXIV, 2nd ed., (1960).

[111] It appeared in *Rassegna bibliografica della letteratura italiana*, XV (1907).

[112] Published by Le Monnier (Florence: 1906).

[113] Published posthumously in 1897 and 1900 by a committee headed by Carducci.

Although Gentile does not speak of poetry in the Vichian sense, that is, as an expression of the infancy of humanity, but as poetry fostered by thought, we are still far removed from his "actual idealism." His indebtedness to Hegel and to Croce is here evident: to Hegel for his conception of art as an activity which does not reach the systematic form of thought but remains as the sensible symbol of the thought to which it tends; to Croce for the distinction between philosophy and poetry and for the lyrical character of the latter. However, Gentile voices the exigency for giving art a more comprehensive meaning—an exigency that Croce himself was to satisfy about ten years later, when he theorized, under the influence of Gentile, that art breaks the limits of the individual and encompasses the whole life of the spirit in its universality.[118] Gentile's derivation of poetry from thought indicates a conception of poetry not as pure lyric expression in beautiful images and rhythms, but as poetry impregnated with philosophical meditation. The philosophy of a poet, then, must be studied in order to understand his poetry, and must be evaluated as poetry on the basis of the feeling which permeates it. In Leopardi there is a poetry of the heart which constantly springs from metaphysical speculation. Without that thought which sweeps away all illusions and bares the infinite vanity of all things, there would not be that poetry of the heart. Whatever the poet does or says, he never unfolds a philosophical system, but expresses only his own state of mind. The thoughts and reflections found in Leopardi's *Zibaldone* have no value in themselves; they are raw material which the author destined to be the subject matter of poetic expression. In fact, some of them found a more perfect expression in his poems and some of them in the *Operette morali*. What is left is the element which poetry was unable to transform, to fuse, and to transfigure into a song or a satire. "It is very difficult," says Gentile, "for the same genius to be both poet and philosopher, since poetry requires an activity which philosophy fights and mortifies."[119] Dante is the only exception to this. He is the only poet capable of fusing in his mind feeling and intellect, the concreteness of life and the abstractness of concepts. Leopardi's character is poetical, "and outside his poetry, his thought is mediocre from the philosophical point of view";[120] there is in him a heartfelt reflection on the problems which perpetually torment his mind, but there is never a systematic thought.[121]

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[114] *Manzoni e Leopardi*, 2nd ed., p. 35.

[115] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[117] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

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[118] See, in *Nuovi saggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1920), the essays "Il carattere di totalità dell'espressione artistica," written in 1917, and "L'arte come creazione e la creazione come fare," written in 1918.

[119] *Manzoni e Leopardi*, p. 41.

These ideas are emphasized by Gentile in another essay in 1911[122] on the occasion of the publication of Giulio Levi's *Storia e pensiero di Giacomo Leopardi.* Although Gentile continues to keep a definite distinction between the poetic temperament and the philosophical mind, he makes a great effort here to submerge the Crocean distinction in his own emerging "actual idealism":

> We cannot speak of Homer the poet and of Plato the philosopher without a concept of the poet and of the philosopher, that is, of poetry and of philosophy, which, as functions of the spirit, transcend history, which is the very concreteness of spiritual reality. And one can assign distinctive characteristics only to poetry and to philosophy as transcendental functions of the spirit—the characteristics of poetry being different from those of philosophy and vice versa. In history all the functions contribute to the concrete unity, in which the poet, being also the philosopher, partakes of the nature of the spirit which is philosophy; and the philosopher, being also a poet, partakes of the nature of the spirit which is poetry. And the rigid and solid distinction of the abstract functions is replaced by the plastic and mobile distinction of history, which makes the distinction between poets and philosophers among the great minds, in accordance with the prevailing moment—the poetic or the philosophic.[123]

This passage clearly foreshadows Gentile's actualistic conception of art which fuses poetry and philosophy in the unity and actuality of the spirit. Leopardi does not represent a philosophy but his own soul in its immediacy. Gentile in fact insists on the immediacy of Leopardi's poetry, recognizing its purely lyrical nature, and rejects Levi's interpretation which considers Leopardi's poetry as springing from an ethical preoccupation.

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[120] *Ibid.*, p. 43. [121] See *ibid.*, p. 42.

[122] *La critica*, IX (1911), 142–151, 468–480. Now in *Manzoni e Leopardi*, pp. 44–67.

[123] *Manzoni e Leopardi*, p. 48.

Against the students of Leopardi's philosophy, Gentile maintains that in the *Zibaldone* there is nothing more than one finds in the poet's finished works. The diary contains only what could not be dissolved and given artistic form in the poems and the *Operette morali*. It represents the prehistory of these mature works. All the substance was extracted from it and is found elsewhere; hence, the limited importance of the diary. Leopardi's greatness cannot be based on the speculative value of his thoughts, but on his poetry, on the feeling which permeates his intuitions. His philosophy is absorbed in the immediacy of his spirit and does not go beyond an obscure and fragmentary concept of the world; and we are only concerned with the life that this concept acquires in the lyrical mind of the poet.

Here Gentile's logic of the abstract and the concrete begins to emerge. One of the points of his criticism of Levi's book is in fact Levi's failure to see the dialectical nature of the spiritual activity from which Leopardi's works spring, and his failure to study the relations between poetry and philosophy. But Gentile cannot yet free himself completely from Croce's esthetics. He admits that in the poem *La ginestra* reasoning often disrupts the poetic flow of images and that Leopardi "would be greater if these disruptions of poetry did not take place," adding further that rhetoric jeopardizes "the lyrical equilibrium of poetry."[124] He concludes that Leopardi's poetry escapes the philosophical scheme adopted by Levi and that it stubbornly remains ever enclosed "in the natural abode of its lyrical pathos."[125]

In 1917, in reviewing Giovanni Bertacchi's book on Leopardi entitled *Un maestro di vita*, Gentile objected to the optimistic interpretation given of the poet's works. He contended that Leopardi's optimism would have no meaning without the pessimistic negation of life, which serves as a necessary antithesis:

> The very root from which all of Leopardi's poetry draws its substance lies in this inner contradiction between the wickedness of nature and the goodness of the spirit which conceives within itself the vision of

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[124] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

this nature. In order to understand Leopardi's poetry it is necessary to retain both contradictory elements.[126]

Here Gentile's actualism and the dialectical nature of feeling are accentuated. The conflict between poetry and philosophy is suppressed by Gentile when, commenting on Bertacchi's observation that in some poems the poet prevails over, and jeopardizes, the philosopher, he argues that "all the overflowing poetry" in those poems is but the "embodiment of the very idea of the philosopher," and adds that to speak of a dualism of poetry-philosophy and of the poet prevailing over the philosopher is to be blind to the wholeness of poetry, which is a synthesis of opposites.[127]

Since the recurring problem concerning Leopardi was the relation between poetry and philosophy, critics faced such a problem from a quantitative point of view. They held that while in the *Canti* the poetic inspiration prevails over philosophical thought, in the *Operette morali* philosophical thought prevails over the poetic inspiration. Thus they sacrificed either poetry or philosophy. For Gentile, on the contrary, Leopardi is always a poet. Whether he sings or reasons, in reality he expresses his feelings, his subjective truth—a truth on which he does not impose the objective criticism that constitutes philosophy. His philosophy is transformed into life, thus becoming the vibration and rhythm of his own feeling. He is incapable of overcoming his subjectivity and of formulating a doctrine; he is unable to reach the philosophical concept of reality, which is the true and supreme reality. He gives us the poetic form of reality—the intuitive form. One cannot consider Leopardi as a philosopher, since in his works there is no philosophical concept, but a state of mind which vibrates in all its humanity. The *Operette morali* is a book of poetry and not a philosophical treatise aimed at speculative and didactic purposes. "Leopardi feels and lives his superior truth, but is unable to give it a speculative and reflective form. He experiences in himself the power of his spirit which he asserts through the movement of his heart."[128] In reading Leopardi one must pay heed not "to what he says but rather to the way he says it, to the tone of his words, in which lies his soul and the life and value of his prose that I wish to consider more as poetry than as argumentation."[129] Leopardi can be regarded as a philosopher, but a philosopher without a system, since the philosophical ideas he received through reading the works of philosophers close to his own views did not undergo further development in his mind. He repeats without elaborating what he has accepted. There are two ways of being a philosopher, he comments—one specific and the other general. In the specific sense, philosophers are those who invent systems; in a broader sense, philosophers are also those who study such systems and try to find an answer to the problems which torment their mind. Philosophy, that is, the urge to explain life, to find a meaning for it, is at the bottom of every man's spirit. In this sense, Leopardi was a philosopher, since his life was a constant search for truth—the truth of the human existence; he was a philosopher in a general way, who felt the problems rather than trying to solve them philosophically, systematically, rationally. "His philosophical convictions did not remain in his head, but they descended into his heart, and they became his own person, the immediate feeling which vibrated in his heart."[130] His conception of life lies in a few ideas, but these ideas transformed themselves into a variety of poetic images and accents. Therefore, in Leopardi, philosophy became feeling and poetry. Philosophy is the content of his poems, which are philosophy made feeling, that is, a living reality.

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[126] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

It is evident that Gentile, while asserting the spiritual unity of the poet's works, points to poetry as the embodiment of ideas (ideas which could not achieve the conceptual form) and stresses the feelings of the poet as the true substance of art. But a radical departure from Hegelian or Crocean formulas is noticed in his articles "La poesia del Leopardi," in 1927, "Poesia e filosofia del Leopardi," in 1938,[131] and in his last essay on Dante, "Il canto di Sordello" (Canto VI of *Purgatorio*), written in 1939. Gentile emphasizes that it is arbitrary to seek the philosopher as distinct from the poet in Leopardi, or a philosophy as distinct from his poetry. All of Leopardi is in that emotionally colored thought, in that philosophical feeling which make up the whole of his personality. It is, then, impossible to draw a sharp line between the poet and the philosopher. His poetry is his philosophy. Thus Gentile becomes the defender of the unity of Leopardi's works: the *Canti* and the *Operette morali* are a whole in which the mind of the writer actualized itself in its unity of feeling and thought. It is misleading to say that the *Operette morali* are philosophical and the *Canti* simply lyrical. In both, the poet expresses his state of mind, the life which invades his soul. His thought is life, the rhythm of his self. In both the *Operette morali* and the *Canti* his mental attitude is expressed in lyrical notes. The *Operette* are as poetic as the *Canti*, since they do not contain any philosophical argumentation but the soul of the poet in its oneness. He feels and lives his own truth without giving it a speculative form, and he asserts it with the impulses of his heart. In the tone of his words lies the beauty of his art.

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[128] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Gentile takes issue with Croce's conception of poetry as a lyrical fragment, since for Gentile poetry is not to be found in lines or passages, but in the whole of a work. The meaning and relevance of a line or a passage result from the context to which they belong, and they acquire value in the complex organism of which they are a part. Each word has an accent in which its individuality lies; and this accent cannot be felt outside the rhythm of the whole. It is an absurd enterprise to try to isolate a word or a phrase from it. In "Il canto di Sordello" Gentile points to the intrinsic unity of the work of art. In reconstructing the episode of Dante's and Virgil's meeting with Sordello, Gentile cannot refrain from leveling his attacks against

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[131] See the volume *Manzoni e Leopardi.*

> Those critics who, by dint of analysis, dismember the poetic organism and end with heterogeneous pieces in their hands, some of them prosaic, others artificial and dead, and others living or seeming to be living and still capable of movement and resistence . . . to the violence of anatomy.[132]

There is general agreement that the sixth canto of *Purgatorio* contains a high poetic moment. It occurs when Sordello, who stands aside and alone, proud and disdainful, without uttering a word, suddenly springs to his feet at the sound of the name of his birthplace mentioned by Virgil. "O Mantuan, I am Sordello, from your own land!" cried the solitary soul, embracing the Latin poet without even knowing who he was. In this touching scene there is the whole of Sordello, the whole of his personality and his inner world; there is a Sordello who remains unforgettable. The scene prompts Dante's well-known invective against Italy torn by dissension and anarchy. While these two noble souls in purgatory feel united by the love of their city, the Italians cannot live without war against one another even within the wall of the same town.

But according to Croce, the invective against Italy is a piece of oratory and not poetry. From the tone of deep and serene humanity, from the pinnacle of poetry, Croce argues, Dante descends to a bitter political diatribe against the perversity of the Italian people and the indifference of their leaders:

> The invective against Italy bursts out unexpectedly and is a true digression (as indeed the poet says); it is too long and elaborate to suit the situation, which is only capable of supporting the first three terzinas. Dante gives vent to a complete piece of oratory, with divisions, transitions, exclamations, exhortations, ironies, sarcasms; although under the influence of passion, he forgets nothing which might possibly be said to further his political aim.[133]

Poetry has here vanished to reappear when Dante, "declaring that it is vain to listen to political matters, turns away from

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[132] *Studi su Dante*, *Opere Complete*, vol. XIII, p. 224.

[133] *The Poetry of Dante*, translated by Douglas Ainslie (New York: Holt, 1922), pp. 166–167.

Sordello and loses himself in the scene taking place around him."[134]

Gentile, on the contrary, considers Dante's outburst as reflecting the feeling of the poet, the patriot, the citizen—the whole of Dante. Therefore, the so-called oratorical digression is an integral part of the whole, for it throws light, by contrast, on the poetic figure of Sordello as imagined by Dante:

> The usual critics, armed with an anatomical knife, will tell you that the "digression" is a piece of oratory, a piece that the practical man inserts in the living organism of his poetry in order to carry on his polemic and his political propaganda; and that Dante, of course, should have abstained from it, for where practical interests emerge, poetry vanishes. This is all true, but only in the abstract; in the concrete, nothing is in itself unpoetic, refractory to the animating breath of art. We must see whether practical interests remain as crude practical interests, or whether they are dissolved by the fire of poetic inspiration.[135]

The "digression" is, to Gentile's mind, the expression of the feeling and the judgment of the poet; and it is essential to the whole episode. The contrast between the tender scene the poet had observed and the bloody conflicts ravaging Italy was too striking to leave him indifferent and silent. His political ideal and the tragic reality of political events are part of the very drama of his own life. And his aversion to the political situation gives the figure of Sordello an extraordinary magnitude. It is not the case, argues Gentile, to speak of oratory, but of a picture in which the artist, in order to throw a vivid light on the figure he intends to bring out, had to give it a sombre and frightening background. When we read the digression with the tone required by its true meaning, it does not tolerate any oratorical emphasis, but only the passion which is in the words of the poet, the passion which was in his soul of citizen and artist, engaged both in action and poetic creation, ready to pour into the imagination all of his political passions in order to enlighten his

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[135] *Studi su Dante*, p. 231.

social conduct with the ideals of his spirit of refined poet and of thinker.[136]

As for Leopardi's poetry, which Croce confines to the "idylls," Gentile asserts that the "idylls" represent only one aspect of Leopardi's poetic creation. There is much more to it, and we would miss the real essence of the poet's work if we stopped at the idylls. Leopardi's poetry springs from the unity of two opposites—thought and feeling: thought which dispels all illusions and uncovers the "infinite vanity of everything" and transforms itself into feeling. Without that thought it would be impossible to have the lyrical notes in which thought itself is dissolved. Every poet has a philosophy, a faith, a belief, a concept of life. But this philosophy, judged from a rational point of view, reveals its weakness, that is, its contradictions, the dogmatic character of its assertions, the immediacy of its beliefs. And if the poet is to be judged on the coherence of his philosophy, it will be impossible to discover his greatness. He must be judged from the side through which his greatness shines, and not from the opaque side. The essence of poetry is not in the poet's thought, but in the feeling that the poet has of his thought; poetry does not lie in the world he sees, but in the way he sees it. Ideas, when taken away from the attitude that the self assumes toward them (that is, outside their vital context), are pale shadows. The philosophy of Leopardi must be considered not for what it is, but for the tone in which it is expressed; for in this tone lie both the author's personality and his poetry as well.

Croce had maintained that poetry does not consist in that philosophical-emotive content, but in the perfect expression of feeling. This definition was meant to solve the controversy between classicists and romanticists by giving due importance both to the emotional element and the perfect expression. Croce's criticism was aimed at discovering, in a work of art, the poetic and the nonpoetic elements, that is, the right or the wrong expression, the sincere or the false feeling (or, better, feeling and lack of feeling), leading to the poetic or nonpoetic expression. His judgment on Leopardi could be summarized in these terms: in the *Operette morali*, with few exceptions, there is neither poetry nor philosophy, but a simple attempt at rationalizing an emotional state of mind, which comes out cold, false, and alien to the true feeling of the writer; in the *Canti* there is poetry and nonpoetry; there are poems which, like the prose works, are too rhetorical and philosophical; there are oratorical compositions in which one feels the lack of warmth and inspiration. When reasoning rises, poetry vanishes. The great Leopardian poetry is to be found only in the idylls such as "Il sabato del villaggio," "La quiete dopo la tempesta," "A Silvia," "Il passero solitario," "L'infinito," and so on.

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[136] See *ibid.*, p. 233.

On the basis of Croce's criticism, Gentile argues, it is fortunate if out of the whole of Leopardi's poetry a few fragments can be saved. Even if they are saved, it is not in these fragments that one can grasp and appreciate poetry, but in the rhythm of the whole. To isolate verses and phrases from the whole of Leopardi's works is a completely absurd mutilation. Leopardi's works are Leopardi's mind in the concreteness of its unity, in the synthesis of feeling and thought, in which the actuality of art consists. Moreover, it does not suffice to indicate where poetry is and to distinguish poetry from nonpoetry; but it is necessary to actualize art in our own mind.

Gentile's appreciation of Manzoni puts stress on the moral substance of his work. The case of Manzoni is similar to that of Dante, since both were great poets—spiritual guides, teachers of truth, who expressed the totality of life. Here again Gentile's approach runs opposite to that of Croce, whose judgment on Manzoni is a condemnation of what Gentile praises most—the moral intention dominating Manzoni's work. In Croce's estimation, Manzoni's masterpiece, *The Betrothed*, is a work of moral reflection, poetic inspiration being only episodic. The novel springs from ethical exigencies, from didactic purposes, and any poetic element is subordinated to the ethical principles permeating the whole work. Croce admires in it the "singular fusion of tones and the continuous and undisturbed harmony,"[137] but he denies the poetical character of the whole, considering the work oratorical in nature, aimed at moral persuasion. In its entire development, Croce contends, the author never departs from the ethical principle which motivated the work. His characters lack the immediacy of poetic creations. In the treatment of his subject Manzoni is a lucid moralist and not a poet. He absolves and condemns. Human passions and conflicts are not judged for what they are, but for what they represent in the light of a superior moral concept. The free movement of affections and passions, the anguish of doubt, the desire for happiness, the dream of beauty and domination, the joy and the toil of love are absent from his work. By setting a moral ideal, the author allows only images which embody and images which oppose this ideal; hence, a certain monotony and narrowness in his novel. In fact, when Manzoni wrote it, he had already overcome his inner conflicts and had reached a state of serenity and wisdom—the wisdom of the moralist who judges human reality instead of simply portraying it. His novel is a masterpiece of coherence and intelligence, a work of fine literature, not one of poetry.[138]

It is known that, toward the end of his life, Croce reversed this judgment and openly confessed his error, explaining the reasons which had led him to such a controversial verdict on one of the most admired masterpieces of modern Italian literature. He admitted that in his periodic rereading of the novel he had always experienced an ever-growing emotion and consolation and had felt an increasing admiration for the perfection of its form as well as a deep regret for the negative judgment he had expressed.[139] But his correction of judgment did not imply a change in his critical principles; it only meant that what he had previously mistaken for a fine piece of oratory proved later to be something else—not a work of religious propaganda but a genuine work of art, profoundly and sincerely felt by its author. His position remained, nevertheless, firmly opposed to that of Gentile, who extolled in the author of *The Betrothed* "the teacher who, more than any other Italian writer, taught the Italians the art of living in dignity."[140] For Gentile, Manzoni's work is one of great poetry, not a poetry such as that of *Orlando furioso*, which lifts our imagination to the sphere of incantation, but a work of living experience which speaks to the heart, the mind, the conscience—to the whole man. *The Betrothed* is the book of a poet, for it is the book of a man. In Gentile's opinion, the Renaissance had attracted the Italians to pure art and to abstract intelligence; this tendency degenerated into the empty and frivolous literature of the academies; with Parini and Alfieri a new ideal of art begins to be felt in contrast to the dead academic erudition which had divorced literature from the concrete problems of life. But after Dante no one, except Manzoni, had expressed the profound ideals of the human spirit. Manzoni was for Gentile the first to fuse in the fire of his creative virtue the fundamental aspirations of man's moral world and to give utterance to the problems of his times, to restore the faith that life is governed by love and not by chance or by an evil power. In each poet beats the heart of a man, since there is no poetry in which man does not hear one of the intimate voices of his self. Manzoni's poetry springs from his religious and moral vision; it is that vision itself, in which the total rhythm of life circulates.

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[137] *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. III (Bari: Laterza, 1951), p. 249.

[138] See especially the two articles "Manzoni" in *Poesia e non poesia* (Bari: Laterza, 1955), pp. 131–149; and "Intorno al Manzoni" in *Conversazioni critiche*, vol. III (Bari: Laterza, 1951), pp. 231–256.

[139] See *Terze pagine sparse*, I (Bari: Laterza, 1955), pp. 128–130.

While Gentile eloquently elaborates on the moral essence of Manzoni's work, emphasizing its moral beauty, he gives, however, no concrete evidence of its esthetic qualities or weakness. Beauty is for Gentile the animating principle immanent in the work of art—the subjectivity of the author, which can only be grasped in thought, where the mental process takes a concrete form. Truth and beauty seem to coincide. But Gentile's critical observations do not go beyond the generic statements, while the reader would like to see concrete and specific instances of poetic qualities and weaknesses. In this respect, the essay on Manzoni appears, strictly speaking, more as a celebrative piece, pointing to the moral substance of Manzoni's work, than a piece of literary criticism: "Things that everyone has always admired and exalted are to be taken seriously; thus, they are to be done and not only said: here lies the great novelty of the Manzonian vision of life."[141]

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[140] *Manzoni e Leopardi*, p. 27.

As for Vittorio Alfieri (*L'eredità di Vittorio Alfieri*), Gentile is interested in the patriot, in the man who shook the Italians from their slumber, in the writer who, like Dante, "obscurely felt that he was a prophet of the times to come." And Gentile fuses the teacher, the prophet, the patriot, and the poet in order to form the personality of the author in its unity. Gentile warns against the distinction between the man and the artist and quotes Alfieri himself in order to substantiate his own principle concerning the unity of each personality. No book can be judged without judging the man:

> The writer cannot make others feel deeply what he himself does not feel deeply. What is not strongly expressed makes no impression; only that which is weakly felt or of which the author is not deeply convinced is weakly expressed.[142]

The lack of feeling stems from the lack of thinking and acting, from a completely passive existence. The prominent characteristic of great men (artists, scientists, legislators, statesmen, military men, and such like) is deep feeling, which is the basis for human excellence. What Gentile praises in Alfieri is the poet-seer, his moral temper, his stirring action to awaken the Italians to the idea of liberty and unity. But he says nothing about the artist and his art, except for some generalities which are of little help. We can understand the man and the patriot in

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[141] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[142] *L'eredità di Vittorio Alfieri*, *Opere Complete*, vol. XVII (1964), pp. 94–95.

Alfieri, but we cannot grasp the distinct qualities of his art. Croce, in this respect, is more specific. In his essay on Alfieri in *Poesia e non poesia*, he defines the historical position of Alfieri and characterizes his art, pointing out qualities and weaknesses. In Croce's view, Alfieri's works are not essentially poetic; they are, instead, passionate oratory.[143] Alfieri's customary defects are "the intellectual reflection which often anticipates the artistic vision and gives it the flavor of something analyzed and calculated."[144] But his defects are outweighed by authentic poetic qualities which show genuine inspiration. And Croce points to the poetic and the nonpoetic in a concrete manner. Gentile's main interest is, in a sense, broader than Croce's. It is true that the life of a man must be distinguished from his works; but for Gentile this distinction is possible only insofar as the antecedents of his works are in his life. In the events of his life there is always the very subject which manifests itself fully in his artistic creations. In order to understand his art, one must look at the man, at his temper, "which breaks through in the light of his poetry."[145]

Gentile explains the works through the study of the writer's thought and actions, but he rarely judges the works on purely artistic grounds; and when an artistic judgment slips into his general evaluation, he cannot escape some of Croce's tenets. In his book on Alfieri we find, in fact, this judgment:

> In the tragedies, in general, there is too much oratory against the abhorred tyranny; and the tyrants who fill the stage are not very human, with few exceptions. In the political-philosophical prose works too much passion prevails over logical argumentations. In the comedies, in the satires and epigrams the satirical intention is smothered by excessive reflection and intentional sarcasm. In the poems, beautiful sonnets are altered by an abundant literary rhyming—colorless and forced.[146]

This leaning toward Croce's more concrete approach to literary criticism shows the difficulty for the practical critic to judge a work of art in the light of an esthetics which submerges art in the totality of the real, as a soul immanent in a body. In this sense, art is an impalpable *quid* dissolved in the whole reality—thought—in which it is impossible to distinguish what is art from what is not.

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[143] *Poesia e non poesia*, p. 5.

[144] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[145] *L'eredità di Vittorio Alfieri*, p. 203.

[146] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

The main disadvantage of Gentile's esthetics, when compared with Croce's, stems from the difficulty of its practical application. Gentile is concerned with a writer as a whole, as a totality of intellectual and practical experiences, and not with specific artistic qualities as elicited by his poetic expression. The practical critic prefers to deal with specifics, with the distinctive qualities of the work of art and not with something submerged in the whole and identified with it. Gentile's attitude, on the other hand, explains his firm opposition to Croce's purely imagistic conception of art, which tends to disregard all the philosophical awareness underlying the poetic image. Although the sort of speculative art advocated by Gentile might smother every inspiration not fostered by philosophical thought, one must admit that his esthetics may prove more adequate than Croce's for a thorough appreciation of complex artistic works and personalities. While Croce points specifically to the poetic and the nonpoetic, the expressive and the nonexpressive in a work of art, Gentile seeks to embrace, in a broader vision, the whole life of a writer, which finds expression in his work. In this sense, Gentile's conception of art is more broadly humanistic than Croce's, for it encompasses the whole man, not only the artist. Gentile's indifference toward specific formal qualities in a poet definitely runs counter to some of the latest literary schools which tend to dehumanize poetry by seeing in a lyric poem or a page of prose only relations between syllables and other stylistic devices, bereft of the least human impulse.[147] Rather than concerning himself with the play on words and syntax, with grammatical and linguistic elements in their objective immobility, Gentile concentrates on the spiritual genesis of the art work, on the personality and moral character of the writer. If Gentile's aim in literary criticism is to grasp the philosophical thought in the varied tone of the work of a writer, Croce is only concerned with the lyrical expression, and he excludes all forms of reflection or thinking from the domain of art. For Gentile, art is thought, in which the whole of human experience culminates; for Croce, art precedes thought: art is a dream which vanishes when thought appears. These two conflicting positions could perhaps be reconciled in a third that takes into account both the expressive *quid* which makes the poet a poet, and the philosophical experience which grows in the spirit of a writer. Gentile's contribution to contemporary esthetics is of great significance, for it represents a denunciation of those theories which tend to consider art as a quintessence completely detached from the total rhythm of life. His esthetics is a vigorous attempt to free the critics of a purely imagistic and sensual conception of art (in the Vichian sense) and to call attention to the cosmic experience lying behind the image of the poet.[148]

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[147] See Luigi Russo, *Storia della critica contemporanea*, 3rd ed., vol. II (Bari: Laterza, 1954), p. 114.

Gentile's Idealism Compared with Croce's

In outlining Gentile's theory of art, frequent references to Croce were inevitable, for Gentile, as was shown at the beginning of these pages, developed his own philosophy in friendly polemic with Croce. In order to clarify the nature of the two philosophers' *concordia discors*, we shall sum up broadly their respective positions.

Both philosophers branch out mostly from the Hegelian trunk, but they go beyond Hegel in two different directions. Croce, after long reflection, felt that Hegel's error was in his logic, where the dialectic of the opposites suppressed the dialectic of the "distincts," and that without the principle of distinction the logic of opposition could not even arise. Gentile, on the contrary, retained the Hegelian dialectic of the opposites, but changed the opposites to "abstract" positions of the only reality, which is the synthesis. The substance of their debate seems to revolve around these two points: unity which suppresses all distinctions, or unity which preserves the distinctions? Gentile led Croce toward the first form of unity; but Croce, with his keen sense of reality, stopped at the threshold of indistinction. He felt the necessity for the unity advocated by Gentile, but he could not give up the principle of distinction.

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[148] See *ibid.*, p. 100.

The substantial point of their difference is clearly summed up by Croce in 1922:

> Our general conception of philosophy of the Spirit (of the subject, and never of nature, or the object) has developed a peculiar stress in Gentile, for whom philosophy is above all that point in which every abstraction is overcome and submerged in the concreteness of the act of thinking; whereas for me philosophy is essentially methodology of the one real and concrete thinking—historical thinking. So that while he strongly emphasizes unity, I no less energetically insist on the distinction and dialectic of the forms of the Spirit as a necessary formation of the methodology of historical judgment.[149]

And later he reiterated, more specifically, his dissension with "actual idealism" in the following terms:

> I had thought of a philosophy springing from the practical and moral problems of life in their changing and varied aspects; and actual idealism stood indifferent above them . . . imagining itself on the highest peak from which it would not deign to descend to earth. I maintained that philosophical unity is not an abstraction like mathematical unity, but that it is concrete and therefore organic and living unity, and consequently a unity of distincts; and actual idealism set a unity so tight in its oneness as to be foolish . . . . I maintained that the spirit is, in every act, an *a priori* synthesis; and actual idealism made the synthesis impossible by weakening the energetic terms of it through an artificial unification. I maintained, among the distinctions, the fundamental one—that of theory and practice, thought and will; and actual idealism declared it to be an old prejudice, asserting that will and thought are the same thing. I gave history the most impor-

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[149] Introduction to Gentile's *The Reform of Education*, p. x.

tant place in knowledge, showing that it is the concrete philosophizing which can never be outside of history; and actual idealism continued to conceive of a history purely historical to which the philosopher would add a philosophy of history.[150]

Although both philosophers are essentially monists and both consider the spirit to be the only reality, Croce's distinctions, which result in four forms or degrees of reality, run counter to Gentile's conception of unity, according to which reality is one—the *act of thinking*—and all distinctions are but abstract elements developing into the oneness of reality. Croce, while emphatically asserting that the four forms emanate from the spirit, which is always present and active in their manifestations, conceives of the spiritual act as a synthesis of "distincts" and not of "opposites" (opposites devour each other). Consequently, every manifestation of the spirit represents, in the circle of spiritual life, the synthesis of a distinct content and form—art is the synthesis of feeling and intuition, thought is the synthesis of image and concept, volition, in its two forms—particular and universal—is the synthesis of perception and feeling. There are, in other words, four realities and not one as Gentile maintains—four realities developing from one another, for each synthesis becomes the content of the subsequent synthesis.

Croce's system, seen from Gentile's point of view, is based on a sort of dichotomy between the theoretical and the practical activity of the spirit. Croce considered these two activities (the first aimed at knowing, the second at doing) as two distinct forms of spiritual reality. He divides each into two more distinct forms (the esthetic and the logical for the theoretical, the economic and the ethical for the practical), thus arriving at what Gentile ironically calls "the philosophy of the four words," a philosophy which, in Gentile's opinion, breaks the concrete unity of the spirit. There is, he argues, no *homo aestheticus*, *homo logicus*, *homo oeconomicus*, *homo ethicus*, acting separately. Croce's "distinctions" must be looked upon as "separations."

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[150] *Terze pagine sparse*, II, p. 83.

Although Croce constantly stressed that he meant "distinctions" and not "separations," historical forms in which the spirit (the only absolute reality) manifests itself, he was never able to dispel the suspicion that his philosophical conception would lead to a "compartmentalization" of the life of the spirit. On the other hand, he viewed the tendency of practical activity to usurp the functions of theoretical activity as one of the aberrations of pragmatism and voluntarism. Moreover, he emphasized that the attempt of economics to replace morality stems from the false views of utilitarianism and historical materialism, and the fusion and confusion of imagination and intellect, art and philosophy, was the result of the erratic assumptions of romantic idealism. To think is for Croce to unify by distinguishing or to distinguish by unifying, and there is no reality without distinction.

The problem of the relationship between the distinct forms of spiritual activity was a matter of deep concern throughout his entire existence. While admitting that the spirit is always present with all of its functions in every single act, he never succeeded, in the opinion of his critics, to unify what he had distinguished, except verbally:

> I, too, firmly hold that the forms of the spirit follow from one another and that the will cannot exist and is not conceivable without thought, nor is the latter without the former, nor thought without imagination, nor imagination without thought, and so on: hence my conception of the circularity of the spirit.[151]

But, in his conception, the dialectical progress of the spirit seems to be lacking, for poetry either is or is not, philosophy either is or is not; everything has either a positive or a negative character, a reality of its own.

Gentile, on the contrary, considers the spiritual process to be the dialectic of opposites and not of "distincts": there is no dialectic where there is no opposition. And the opposition is immanent in the synthesis and is not an opposition of two realities but of two abstract elements which acquire reality in their union. The dialectic of the "distincts" has, in his opinion, no internal reason and is therefore useless. The spirit, forced to a perennial circular movement, is like a "mad dog chasing its tail," for there is "no logical reason to go back to the beginning unless the beginning and the end are identical."[152]

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[151] *Conversazioni critiche*, II, p. 68.

Gentile suppresses any dichotomy and fuses everything in the *act of thinking*. Thinking and doing are abstract degrees of the very same process; thought and being are the same reality of the spirit. The distinctions are purely logical and not real, for there is no pure poet without concepts, no pure philosopher without feeling who contemplates without acting; there is no purely economic man who has no moral preoccupations. The poet has a moral personality, a thought, and a practical energy. Although it is his poetic genius which prevails in him and creates images, there is no radical difference between esthetic and logical activities, since both are necessary functions of the same unfolding process of spiritual activity. The presence of thought would not break the esthetic spell, since thought is the very condition of the expression of feeling; art as pure feeling in its immediacy is completely unreal. Croce's distinctions are firmly rejected by Gentile, unless taken as abstract degrees of the dialectical process which involves simultaneously the whole life of the spirit.

Unquestionably Croce was not insensitive to the need for absolute unity in the spiritual act. The growth of his esthetics, in fact, from the concept of intuition and then of lyrical intuition of the individual to the broader and more comprehensive notion of the universality and totality of lyrical intuition and to art as doing and, finally, as morality, seems to obey the general preoccupation postulated by Gentile, that of the unity and totality of every act of the spirit. If art is for Croce the first moment of spiritual activity, it is also the last, since in the circular movement of the life of the spirit, the first moment coincides with the last. And if the last moment, which is the ethical, contains all the others (the esthetic, the logical, and the economic), this implies that art represents the totality of spiritual life *sub specie intuitionis*, encompassing the whole spirit, with all of its forms. Art, thus, comes surprisingly close to philosophy (the totality of knowledge); it is no longer alogical knowledge, the dawn of spiritual activity, but ethical life embracing the whole human drama.

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[152] Page 53 below.

From the concept of art as immediacy, Croce arrived at the concept of art as mediation and, therefore, philosophical knowledge. However, his mental habits, his background, his concrete literary experience prevented Croce from accepting "actual idealism." Although he was attracted by the inner logic of a system of absolute immanence which guarantees the unity of the spirit, he certainly saw the danger of suppressing all distinctions. The direct outcome of such a suppression was, in his opinion, mysticism and its ineffable reality. While Gentile fought vigorously the specter of dualism, Croce tried to avoid the one of mysticism. As a result, Gentile remained in his extreme subjectivism, submerging everything in the *mare magnum* of indistinction (which, in the opinion of his critics, renders every value judgment of the particular impossible); Croce, on the other hand, was unable to free himself completely of an objectivistic or naturalistic conception of art. Since art is intuition, it must be the intuition of something (feeling, nature) which exists outside the self-creative activity of the spirit.

The two philosophers, however, do not represent opposite positions, but two different approaches to the solution of the same problem, two attempts to overcome the traditional duality between subject and object. Gentile, in a sense, begins where Croce ends, and he goes a step further. While Croce did not reach a satisfactory solution, strictly idealistic (he could not eliminate all presuppositions and bring everything to an absolute unity), Gentile found a solution which, although rigorously logical, appears to be less real and, therefore, harder to grasp. Croce remained attached to the particular as real, and he accepted the unity as the necessary relation which the particular entertains with the whole:

I confess that what always interested me is the moment of the particularity, whereas the unity appeared to me as something implied, understood (how can one think that the universe is two or more rather than one?) and offering no other difficulty than those coming from a misunderstanding of its nature.[153]

Gentile considered the particular to be an abstraction when outside the synthesis which constitutes for him the only reality. His main concern was the synthesis, and he saw the particular only in relation to the total life of the spirit. His "actual idealism" reached, thus, an absolute spiritual unity which to common-sense philosophy seems to be beyond the limit of human comprehension.

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[153] *Conversazioni critiche*, II, p. 72.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

Preface [to the First Edition]

This essay, as well as others, had its origin in a course given at the University of Rome in the session 1927–1928. But those who have been acquainted with my writings and thought, even if only since the year 1909, when I published the few pages entitled *The Absolute Forms of the Spirit*, will easily see that the present work is the result of more than twenty years of study and meditation. In fact, the esthetic problem has been ever present in all my philosophical works; and a more special clue to my point of view was already hinted at in my monograph *Feeling* and in my article "Art" in the *Enciclopedia Italiana.*

I do not mean by this that I have always held to what the reader will find in this essay. To say that would somehow be in glaring contradiction with the doctrine here expounded. I would rather say that, by delving more deeply into this problem, I gained, quite naturally, a more profound insight into all the problems of my philosophy. For philosophy has this peculiarity: it does not raise problems which, once each has been solved, can be put away and forgotten.

This is meant to be a book of philosophy. I made it clear even on the title page in order to warn the worthy literary critics of the daily press[a] that this book is not for them. I am fully aware that esthetics in Italy is in their hands; and I do not object to this, for I am convinced that they are able to say interesting things very gracefully. But, with all due respect, I venture to suggest that their esthetics is not philosophy, at least not serious philosophy.[b]

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[a] "Della terza pagina." See Translator's Introduction, note 88. (The translator's footnotes are indicated by letters; the author's by numbers.)

G[iovanni] G[entile]

Forte dei Marmi
September 1930

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[b] The first edition reads: "nemmeno la filosofia delle quattro parole" (not even the philosophy of the four words). See Translator's Introduction, note 89. In the second edition, from which we are translating, the phrase was changed to read: "almeno di quella [filosofia] che sappia il fatto suo."

[*Preface to the Second Edition*]

This book was first published in 1931 and is reappearing twelve years later. Meanwhile a school edition, containing textually the most important chapters, was several times reprinted from 1934 to 1942 and widely circulated. In 1934 the book was translated into German and published by Junker and Dunnhaupt in Berlin. It has gone a long way and this is not the place to discuss the difficulties it encountered among the general public—difficulties arising primarily from the fact that doctrines similar to mine, but much easier to understand and deal with, had earlier been so popularized as to become almost commonplace in the current literary culture. My book was meant to be a work of Esthetics, but more particularly a work of Philosophy; and as such, I believe, it has influenced thinking both in Italy and abroad more than I had at first expected. I am gratified by the hope that it will continue to exert this influence. For this reason I have agreed to publish this second edition for which I have carefully revised the text in order to eliminate some *lapsus memoriae* originally resulting from hastiness and to make my exposition as clear and accurate as I possibly could.

I must sincerely say that I reread the revised text with a great deal of satisfaction—the kind of satisfaction experienced on reading a book, however modest, born of inspiration. Few, in fact, were the superfluities I discovered and eliminated; and having done this, I am confident that the book can, more so now than in the past, attract readers and deepen the meaning of certain fundamental problems of philosophy and life and, thus, retain honorably its place in the Italian literature of this century.

G[iovanni] G[entile]

Florence
November 5, 1943

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM OF ART

I

The Humanity of Art

1. *Curiosity and Problem*

The problem of the nature of art was not invented by philosophers, not at least by those generally considered to be philosophers by profession. Philosophers do not invent problems. They merely concern themselves with those which arise naturally in the minds of all men and which are clearly felt as fundamental needs of the spirit—needs demanding a satisfaction capable of freeing our minds of the discomfort which accompanies every problem.

For this reason a philosophical problem is not the result of mere curiosity, for curiosity is something accidental; it may or may not arise; it may last and stimulate man's mind until he is able to free himself of it. Or it may quickly diminish and imperceptibly fade away. A philosophical problem, on the contrary, is a necessity springing from the very nature of human thought. Consequently, thought is always faced by problems which it can neither avoid nor silence without solving them, or at least without believing that it has solved them.

And since *necessity* is a characteristic of philosophical thought, every real problem which cannot be avoided or solved is a philosophical problem, whether it arises in connection with a particular science or concerns some particular object or class of objects in experience. The very fact that it arises, and is recognized by thought to be a real problem which must be solved before the life of the mind can proceed further in its unfolding process, clearly implies that it does not concern a particular science, but that it is a philosophical problem. Otherwise it would arise from mere curiosity. In fact, upon close consideration of the matter, we become clearly aware that scientific research *stricto sensu*, oscillates between curiosity and problem. It starts with questions which are accidental because particular and therefore the concern of some special science. But these questions are necessary and become more so for the serious researcher who sees them so interconnected as to form a system, a concept of the world on which his thought labors. His research, in which from time to time he must become fully absorbed in order to conduct it with strong purpose and full critical reflection, is the whole universe—a universe identical in form with that of philosophy.

Indeed, science is seen to be science only from the point of view of philosophy, which perceives its limitations; but from the scientific point of view it is philosophy. Actual scientific thought, for the man thinking it, is neither more nor less than philosophy; it is only seen to be limited, and therefore no longer philosophy, when it is outgrown by man's thought which has expanded to a wider horizon. A science aware of its own limitations is a science mingled with philosophy. We know indeed that the world in which man lives, and which occupies his thought, may be a great world or a small one. But the smallest world is great for the man who has never been outside of it and who is not aware of a greater one. When we realize the smallness of the world we live in, we are already outside of it, at least in thought. In reality, it is not the world which is great or small; it is thought which is ever growing and expanding. And by so doing, it distinguishes great men from small—philosophers from scientists, or philosopher-scientists from pure scientists, thus finding that the *purus mathematicus* is not a man, nor is the pure philologist, nor the pure biologist, nor the pure astronomer, nor the pure jurist, and so on. In short, none of them is a man because none of them is a philosopher, each being satisfied with only one side of things which are many-sided and must be studied from every side; each touching one string in the human spirit which, having many strings, can only give its full sound when all of them are played. It is the concern of the philosopher, as well as of every man who participates fully in the world in which he lives, to encompass the whole of life. But this is not the aim of the pure scientist who concentrates with his whole heart upon one aspect of things. And however wide this aspect may be, he himself, who is always a man despite his pure science, cannot help feeling that it is not the whole.

2. *The Universality of Art*

The problem of art, then, is no matter of mere curiosity but an essential problem, that is, a philosophical problem. It is not accidental, but necessary. Philosophy is concerned with it because all men are concerned with it. They cannot ignore it because it contains the two characteristics inherent in all human problems. One of these is that art is not casual and extrinsic to man. It is not one of those things which may enter the realm of human experience and yet leave the subject of that experience—the human spirit—completely unchanged. Nor is it like natural objects which may or may not be known, desired, or in any way treated by us as the material for our activity, whether or not they have a real interest for us; nor like single historical facts the knowledge of which does not essentially change the tenor of our life, nor the ignorance of which causes our mind unbearable uneasiness. On the contrary, art is an essential part of man's self and therefore the least separable from his life or, to be more accurate, the most difficult to distinguish from it. If we were to divide into two categories all possible objects of thought—one which might be called the man himself, the other which would comprise everything else—art would certainly be included in the first. And since man cannot divest himself of his self, so he cannot deprive himself of art, for he cannot help finding it within himself like a thread of gold woven into the woof of his life.

There are in art privileged minds—creators, geniuses—and there are minds endowed only with a capacity to perceive the artistic reality which others have created or are creating. Like-wise there are works of art whose production requires exquisite technical skill, and there are elementary or primitive forms of art whose production and perception do not require any special education or technical training. But since there is no man who does not speak, however undeveloped the language he uses; or does not think and govern his thought by the norms of a rational system verifiable at every point; or is entirely devoid of the moral judgment which enables him to distinguish good from evil; similarly, there is no man so bereft of artistic capacity as to be unable to recognize what has artistic value and what has not and to restrain and guide, as it were, his tongue in the choice of the most expressive words he knows to convey his feelings. By virtue of this artistic capacity, every man inclines his ear to the songs of those who pour out the agitation of their heart in sweet melodies, because their voices, as if they were his own, deliver his bosom of the torment of passion; and he opens his eyes in wonder to the speaking images of plastic art, when his own brush or chisel is unable to evoke new ones from the canvas or the marble. The very tools necessary for the satisfaction of the primary needs of nourishment and protection—clothing, shelter, weapons, and everything else that serves to shield man from the hostile forces of nature—and all that which seems to bring him down to the inferior forms of natural life, gradually appear to him as adorned and beautified and fit to express the spirit which endows them with a beauty that obliterates for a moment their practical utility.

The dumb walls embellish themselves depicting for their dweller the cherished fancies in which his mind delights to expatiate. Scribbles and daubs change to clear-cut images of the passions hidden in his innermost heart, which is pleased to reenter from the outer world to dwell within itself in the intimacy of its abode. From the humblest forms of primitive art to the loftiest and most complex among cultured peoples, the human spirit embraces ever more tightly all of the surrounding material world in order to assimilate it and to transform it into the expression of its inexhaustible life—that life of feeling which gives soul and speech to all things and raises them above the finite and material world. Scarcely has the child opened his eyes on the difficult world in which he has to live, when he must seek the conditions favorable to his survival; and he is prone to burst into tears at the first obstacle in his way. What prods him to succeed in his struggle and to rise above it, into a world where all the obstacles of natural life are overcome in the infinity of the spirit, is the sweetness of his mother's song which, knowing the way to his heart, soothes his troubles, wipes away his tears, and gives him peace by the same cathartic power that every pure work of art exercises on the grown man when it reveals to him the beauty of the world, even while he is brooding deeply over its troubles.

No sooner can the baby's legs support him than he will avail himself of his new-found independence to move about in search of bits of straw and paper, sticks and pebbles, for his first attempts to test his constructive genius. Soon he will be in possession of scraps of lead or coal to draw the sketches which gradually approximate the vague far-off ideal that shines within his mind. And his sketches develop and organize themselves to picture something in which the young mind, in its inner longing, rejoices and mirrors itself. And all the rest of man's life is a constant effort to succeed, by his own forces united with those of others, in the creation of the beautiful things which he never ceases to look for—beautiful things which, when discovered, he never tires of contemplating and enjoying, for he finds in them his own wealth and the nourishment which produces the very substance of his spirit. Thus, he is able to fill the void of the world of experience (which is the world of action) with the fancy of art and to inject into every pore of the heavy and massive organism, which is real life, the exhilarating air of ideality that characterizes beautiful things, things not found ready-made, but created by the godlike power of man.

There is no more eloquent and moving spectacle, to a reflective and pondering mind, than that of a great theater or concert hall. The crowd, of every age and sex and condition, seeking a respite from its daily toil, its habitual thoughts and pastimes, and forgetting its private troubles, is united there in one single feeling—the feeling that the artist expressed in his tragedy, his symphony or his song. And all these diverse minds break their barriers and mingle and vibrate together with the deeply passionate note of the singer or the trembling strings of the violin. Each of them has his life and his world, his ideals and his passions, but all feel at the bottom of their souls one common need which they cannot satisfy unless they strip off these particular passions and ideas and lay bare that human soul which is one and the same in all of them and which perceives and creates beauty. The true human soul is one, and it is capable of preserving its unity through different nations, races, and ages, however indelibly every work of art may bear the imprint of its age and birthplace, that is, the ideas and passions which contributed to shape the life of its creator. It is true that, behind all apparent human differences, there lives in each man that one free soul, by virtue of which all men have, deeply within themselves, a common humanity. This alone makes it possible for us to understand each other, and to cooperate readily in every kind of activity.

In short, man is naturally an artist: he has no need to go outside himself for what is called art. From the dawn of his consciousness, throughout his whole life, in every condition and in every calling, he finds within his own mind the light of art.

3. *The Necessity of the Problem of Art*

It is untrue to say that art might be one of the many things which, although constantly before us, never become the object of our reflection and study or raise any definite problem.

The necessity of the problem of art does not arise merely from the fact that the subject matter of this problem is inevitably present to the human spirit as a result of the human character we have found in art. It arises from another fact which follows from the first by reason of the second characteristic previously ascribed to every true philosophical problem, namely, the impossibility for something to be in consciousness without being an object of consciousness. The peculiarity which distinguishes the spiritual from the natural life is, in fact, that in the former nothing can exist without being known or recognized and so made an object of our attention and reflection. Nothing in the spiritual life is unobserved. Nothing is placed there to develop like a seed, to grow like a living organism, or is found there in the process of development, unless the very power which causes it to be there or moves it to self-realization also takes it as an object of consciousness and a subject matter for reflection. Such reflection may itself be rudimentary and embryonic, hardly more than potential, but it cannot be absent, for its absence would imply the absence of its subject matter.

Consequently, if man is by nature an artist and is spiritually alive only insofar as he participates in the world of art, it follows that he is naturally aware of this essential element of his life. He is led to distinguish this from other elements and to perceive the special features which oblige him to acknowledge it as an essential need of his nature. He may or may not go far in this recognition and in the consequent reflection which step by step it involves; but it is as impossible for him to avoid such reflection as it is to be completely unaware of the existence of art.

A positive evidence of this still undefined consciousness of the artistic activity of the human spirit can be shown by a fact which has not been hitherto investigated but the experience of which is indeed incontestable. This fact is that a more or less clear and reflective consciousness which invariably accompanies the artistic activity is the only test of the philosophical theories on the essence of art—theories which have been tried either to fill in the details of a philosophical system, and thus satisfy systematic requirements, or to obey an intense personal experience which prompted and promoted a special study of the problem of art. In either case the definitions and theories resulting from a particular order of reflection and study are judged true or false not because they are logically consistent with the system from which they are deduced; nor yet because they are more or less in harmony with the genial intuitions of particular thinkers; but because they are acceptable or repugnant to those ideas which every man of taste, or at least every man who reflects and who observes himself, becomes eventually aware of possessing, however little he may have clarified or defined them by special study. These are the ideas which arouse even in the illiterate the desire to go to the opera and which make him aware, however vaguely, of the kind of experience the opera will provide for him. The very same ideas prompt him to say, as the performance goes on, whether he is satisfied or disappointed in his expectations, whether he approves or disapproves, and, in a word, enable him to criticize in the same way, however defectively and mistakenly, as the more influential critic who may happen to have a system in his head.

The artistic consciousness resembles the moral, since both are the consciousness of activities inherent in the human spirit. In morality we all know that every man's spiritual nature is so constituted as to direct his own conduct more or less according to ethical principles and thus to produce by his actions a moral world of his own, which, together with those of all other men, composes the moral world that constantly realizes itself in history. This could not be so if man were not endowed with a so-called moral sense, which enables him to distinguish good and evil, whatever the errors and shortcomings that may have to be wiped out in the gradual evolution of morality. This implies a discriminating criterion, and a certain number of moral concepts, on which philosophical reflection may indeed act, in order to systematize them and connect them with other fundamental concepts which it may find in the human spirit. But such action would not be possible did not these concepts already exist *in nuce*, if they were not there as the objects of every new reflection, marking the limits within which all reflection must confine itself, if it is not to go astray.

This universal and fundamental esthetic and moral awareness is called *sense*, that is, immediate knowledge or the starting point for reflective knowledge. But, properly speaking, it is neither *sense* nor immediate knowledge, even if it appears to be so in the light of the subsequent stages of reflective elaboration it will undergo. For reflection, however accurate and logical and profound, is always susceptible of still further developments; by its own nature, it is destined to become the object of more searching reflection, which will throw further light upon it and possibly modify and correct it, or establish it more firmly and, in a sense, transform it. But even what is called sense, as it exists in the common consciousness of men who have not advanced to the reflective awareness which is philosophy, is really thought. For it reflects upon itself and arrives at a concept of itself, of its own character and needs and of the principles which govern its action. It is thought which, whenever we try to perfect it (and is it not always being perfected?), shows itself to be perfectible and therefore imperfect; and because it is perfectible it must be thought.

This is why art, because of its profound humanity, is a problem for all men and not only for those few who are called philosophers. It is a problem which no man can afford to neglect and which, in fact, no man does neglect.

4. *The Concept of Problem*

What is a problem? One may say that a problem is any difficulty which thought must surmount in order to further the process of development which is its very life and being. And by thought is meant not the attribute of a thinking being such as man, but the thinking being (man) himself. Such a being is always conscious of thinking and, therefore, of himself. Consequently, the cessation of thought is not like the cessation of a physical motion—a mere fact which one can explain, without going any further. Thought is a living being which contains the principles of its life within itself; it is a thinking subject, a personality, which realizes itself as self-consciousness and as will. It reacts, therefore, against obstacles and defends itself against destruction, since its very essence is to realize itself and to refuse to be suppressed or denied.

The obstacle which thought may encounter and which it will strive by its nature to surmount is something that, being opposed to it, must lie outside it and appear to be limiting it. For, as we shall see, thought implies freedom, and freedom implies infinity or absence of limitation. The limit which thought discovers and which it cannot accept without renouncing its own infinity and liberty is its own object. The object, in fact, at first unknown, comes to be known by virtue of its relation to thought which is the knower, such a relation being a continual passage from non-existence to existence. Thus we rightly say that we always come to know what we did not know before.

This object, not yet known but meant to be known, is always the problem of thought—a perennial problem. For, despite the expanding and deepening of knowledge, there is always, unless thought fails, something more to be known, not only in extension but also in depth. If a man persuades himself that he has reached the boundaries of a certain province in the vast realm of the knowable and he resolves to be satisfied with the solid mastery of that limited field, he either ceases to live and thus to think, or he is led to proceed beyond those boundaries, so that every day he may find before him a new object to be known and therefore a new problem to be solved.

So long as the object is not known, it stands there on the horizon of knowledge to make the subject aware of its limitations. As soon as the subject succeeds in knowing it, the limitations vanish and the subject becomes again its true self, which is thought, alone in its infinity. The object may be said to pass into thought from the outside; but in this passage it is no longer anything extrinsic; it becomes an intrinsic element in thought and is assimilated in the subject. This is not the place to explain how the two terms, the knowing subject and the object known, are unified in the subject. I need only mention the doctrine I have fully expounded elsewhere, according to which this duality itself arises from an original unity, which is the cause of the final unity.

For there is one fact which no philosophy can question, however dualistic and however determined it may be to preserve the independence of the object from the subject, and this fact is that the object known is known according to the knowing faculties of the subject. Consequently, it becomes something intrinsic in thought and it no longer disturbs our peace and contentment with the suspicion that we are limited by the presence of something alien to ourselves, which does not favor but rather threatens and impairs our existence.

This is the root of the intolerable uneasiness experienced by our mind before a problem; this is also the root of that craving, that irrepressible impulse, which urges us to seek a solution. Thought is a labor which wears out body and mind, since it engages the whole man incessantly in the solution of problems and never allows him a moment of rest without arousing in his mind a new problem. Thus he is spurred on to a new struggle for a solution; and when from this solution no new problem arises, when there is nothing more to be known, thinking comes to an end and man's life is extinguished.

The problem of the subject is to appropriate and assimilate the object. But this is not a simple act, for the subject which must assimilate the object is in no way simple. It has two characteristics that make it the subject for which the problem arises. One is that it exists; the other is that it is what it is, namely, a subject aware of its own existence, ever the same and yet ever changing, as each of us knows by his own experience. *Existence* and *Essence* are then, to begin with, the two irreducible and indefinable forms of the subject's being. It would be nothing if it did not in the first place exist; but neither would it be anything unless it existed in its essence as self-consciousness. For a subject exists only insofar as it asserts itself through the act of thinking; and if it fails to assert itself thus, nothing in the world can possibly bring it into existence.

Existence and essence are, in any event, the necessary attributes of every entity which is not abstract but real and concrete, that is, deeply thought. Everything is insofar as it exists, and it exists insofar as it is something having a certain character. But existence and essence are so intimately united in thought as to be one and the same thing, that is, thought itself in its development; for the very existence of thought is the realization of itself as having a certain essence. Moreover, the unity of existence and essence, as a unique concept, takes on, in thought, a definitive form which reveals the mystery of their inseparability; and this is the form of the *concept*. For the essence of thought is that essence by virtue of which thought exists insofar as it has the form of the concept. In fact, thought exists in the act of thinking, that is, in the act of developing into the concept of itself.

But when thought sets before itself a problem, that is, proposes to assimilate to itself an object, it does not know that, whatever the object occasioning the problem, the solution will always consist in reducing the object to the concept—the concept being identical with thought itself. So thought confines itself to asking whether this object, which opposes itself to thought, exists and whether its existence limits thought. And then it will ask what this object is and whether it has an essence of its own (as it should if it were in truth an object opposed to the subject) that would rivet the chains which had kept the subject confined. The two questions arising from every problem concerning a given object are: Is it? And if so, what is it? And these two questions are inseparable because the object exists only if it is something, and if it is something it must exist.

But the answer to these two questions does not always leave the mind satisfied. Nor do ordinary experience and the particular sciences, for they are not thought out with any insight, however dim, into the ultimate truth. Ultimate truth can only consist in the complete assimilation of the object to thought, and since the essence of thought is the concept, a problem can only be said to be completely solved when we have not only defined the essence of the object, but have defined it in terms of thought and have seen the object itself to be a concept, that is, the concept of itself or, as I called it in my *Logic*, self-concept.[1] Such a goal is seldom reached with complete certainty; but this does not mean that, until it is reached, the spirit is as completely dissatisfied as if it were still in the bottomless abyss of ignorance. Our assurance of an entity from which we construct the world that seems to surround us; and the rudimentary thought which defines things each by a specific nature of its own (ostensibly different from the thought that thinks them) and thus gives a color to the world we have constructed: all of these are judgments in which the thinking activity of the subject freely unfolds itself, although the subject is not yet aware of its own freedom and feels as if it were encompassed and hemmed in by an infinite multitude of things foreign to its own being. This freedom, though not yet conscious, is the life of thought and thus the triumph of the spirit. For the spirit, by thinking even in these rudimentary ways, succeeds in escaping the feeling and perhaps the suspicion that harsh external realities withstand and enervate its energies; it lives within itself, in a world of thought which is clear and true, the world of experience and science which it creates for itself.

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[1] Gentile, *Sistema di logica*, vol. II, 3rd ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1942), pp. 153–170.

But when thought tries to reflect for a moment on the foundation of its certainty and truth on which it constructs its world, it cannot escape the suspicion that, beyond the things which it ascertains and defines in order to grasp a first impression of them, there lies an inscrutable depth, something mysterious and inaccessible, before which, thought, if prudent, is compelled to avow its impotence. Then labor and affliction return and the delight of knowing vanishes in the most desolate awareness of the void. And men turn their eyes anxiously to religion, to metaphysics, and to philosophy; thought seeks in itself more strength to go beyond the essence of things in order to explain both existence and essence. And to explain them would be to answer a third question, that is: Why?—the question as to the first cause or origin of things. This question is answered to the satisfaction of thought when the essence of the concept is discovered. For when thought attains that awareness of itself which is the concept, then its existence is one with its essence, and it creates itself as thought. The question "Why?" can be answered when it is asked about any reality assimilated to thought and understood, whatever its nature, as being identical with thought. But it can certainly never be answered so long as thought is taken to be one thing and reality another. Until their identity is recognized, any answer that may be offered will be futile.

5. *The Necessity of Proving the Existence of Art*

Many will no doubt refuse to admit the necessity or admissibility of the question "Why?" in connection with art. I say many, not because the number of fools is infinite, but because undeniably most men are disinclined to hard work—and especially to thinking, hardest work of all—in order to obtain what they consider unnecessary, or to convince themselves of the necessity of something which, they feel at first sight, they can do without.

Some will even dispute the usefulness and indeed the sense of the first question, that is, whether art exists. Since they are convinced that art exists (and if someone doubts it, so much the worse for him), the only rational question for them is what art—of which everybody thinks he knows the nature, though he cannot explain it to others—may be. And this in fact is the only question raised by most esthetic theories, even the most justly famous, although their discussion of the nature of art will show in the end the impossibility of not accepting and defending an answer to the first question. For they are led to oppose the theories which, unable to determine the peculiar character of art, simply maintain that there is no such thing as art in the sense of a distinct activity specifically different from other essential activities of the spirit. Nor as they advance in the chosen direction can they evade the question as to the place of the artistic activity within the realm of the spirit which is the whole of reality. Thus they demonstrate the necessity, or at any rate the indeniable existence, of art, at least through the assumption that the spirit necessarily exists.

On the other hand, if most men propose to confine themselves to the study of the essence of art and to evade the metaphysical question of its purpose and source, it is because the path to which they would be drawn by this question appears to lead to a blind alley. It appears so because they are unable to see the identity of essence and concept in which, as we have indicated, the answer lies. Not knowing the way, they naturally prefer to stand still. But, since the true essence of things is identical with the concept, those who confine themselves to discovering the character of art will end their labor in one of two ways: either they find what they were not looking for, namely, what art is and why it is, or else they will fail to find even what they were looking for. And this might easily be shown by a historical analysis of many esthetic systems or sketches of esthetic systems.

The necessity for considering the problem of art in the three aspects which we have indicated will be made clearer by the arguments that will be set out in the following chapters.

II

The Empirical Problem

1. *Empirical Knowledge and Empiricism*

The problem of art is empirical for it arises from the empirical concept of art. That is to say that art is found in the field of experience and that thought cannot discern it without thinking it, without subsuming it under a concept of its own. In the last chapter we remarked that there is no mind so naïve and unreflective as to lack all notions of art.

But when we say "empirical," we do not mean peculiar to vulgar or prescientific minds. Indeed, every scientific concept is empirical by its own nature, at least from our point of view which is always the point of view of every mind engaged in absolute, that is, irrefutably and rigorously logical, thinking. And all science is empirical, so long as it does not develop into philosophy. Science consists in the observation, verification, or external knowledge of whatever is, happens, or is produced. I call it external, because in such observation the knower, that is, the observing thought, assumes that the object known is external to the subject, just as the subject is external to the object. When art is known in this way, by observing attentively what it is and carefully distinguishing it from what it is not, one is led to assume that art, which thought observes and tries to define, is something other than thought. It will be allowed, no doubt, that art is something within the same spirit which is now thinking or trying to think about art. But the spirit which is art is not the spirit which is thinking: as art, it differs from itself as thought.

And the relation between the two stages, or the two forms of the spirit, might almost be depicted as analogous to the relation between a man who finds and rereads his boyish writings and the other self which composed them, the self which can never be again.

Empiricism is the philosophy which claims that all knowledge is empirical. This is the only knowledge considered possible by those who presume that the object, before the subject acquires any knowledge of it, stands opposite the subject, outside of it. This object, of course, may either be something in nature, the experience of which is called external, or it may be in the spirit, the experience of which is called internal, though in a sense it is as external as the other. The essential point is that the object is regarded as external to the subject which is knowing it. And by nature is meant the reality that presents itself as existing prior to the activity by which the spirit knows it, and as conditioning that activity. And by spiritual activity is meant not an activity that has already manifested or may manifest itself, but one that is actually manifesting itself; for this is all that matters and indeed all that can really be known. It is evident that what we call spiritual reality because it once was spiritual, now has already become a part of nature. And if we try to understand its essence, its meaning, and its spiritual value, we must cease thinking of it as being past; we must bring it to life again in the present. Nature, in short, is the past of the spirit; and so we call empirical the knowledge of nature or of the past as such.

Knowledge of natural facts is empirical, and so is knowledge of historical facts as long as in our philological research we consider them as over and done with, something outside ourselves. And empirical is not only the knowledge of the single fact, but also that of the general fact, for, though general and apt to be repeated in the future, it is a *fact*. Its existence and nature are thus already fixed and can be observed and defined in order to lay down its properties and laws. Knowledge of such a fact will enable us to foretell a future which, in relation to the forces involved in it, is in reality a past.

In general, we may say that *knowledge of the past* is empirical. For if the known fact is a natural phenomenon, it would be, like an historical fact, unknowable unless it were logically determined and fixed. The natural fact belongs to the domain of the *logic of the abstract*,[1] whose nature it is to enclose thought within a circle which is either completely determined or has no principle of determination. In fact, anyone who sets about to observe a certain natural phenomenon presupposes that, although still in its process of development, it is already predetermined. Consequently, his aim is to ascertain its antecedents which make its reality what it is.

Empiricism is naturalism, for it only perceives in spiritual reality the aspect by which this reality falls to the level of nature. So the solution of the empirical problem of art can only be found in a naturalistic conception. But such a conception appears immediately inadequate and, therefore, false to those who, from the foregoing considerations, have somehow realized the spiritual nature of art.

2. *Fact and Concept: Apprehension and Interpretation of the Object*

Accordingly, it is impossible to understand art as something spiritual and to see its actualization of the spiritual life, if we think of it empirically and try to seek a solution to the problem it occasions through the study of a reality that can be verified in experience. This would imply a definition of art as a fact beyond question.

In this sense it is said that what is before us—the object of experience, the *matter of fact*, or simply the fact—is beyond question. For if the fact is something visible it will not be denied by anyone who has eyes; if it is audible it can only be doubted by the deaf; and if it is an object of inner sensation (cold, warmth, thirst, hunger, pain, pleasure) it cannot be questioned by anyone who experiences that sensation. The fact is apprehended (or so it appears) immediately; thought, then, proceeds to interpret it.

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[1] *Sistema di logica*, vol. I, chap. VIII.

Such interpretation must be guided by the fact itself and it cannot go wrong if it maintains the utmost fidelity to the fact apprehended.

As we have seen, not everyone would agree with our claim that there are three ways of stating the problem of art. Most, indeed, do not see how there can be a problem at all about the existence of art.

For them its existence, being a fact of which we are empirically aware, is beyond question. Naturally they do not suspect that, if the existence of one thing is beyond question, so is its essence and everything else. In truth, we may say at the start that the *apprehension* of a fact is one thing and its *interpretation* another; but if we have the patience to wait until the process of interpretation is completed so that we may point to the apprehension on the one hand and the interpretation on the other, we shall find that the distinction has vanished and the two operations have become one and the same before our eyes. For if, as we said, the interpretation is to be guided by the fact, this means that, when the fact is apprehended but not yet interpreted (that is, not yet described in its outline and in the elements which compose the distinctive individuality of its being), it cannot yet be said to have been apprehended; we may say either that we have apprehended it or that we have not, for we have apprehended it in part only; we have in fact apprehended it only to the extent that we have interpreted it.

The distinction between whether a thing is and what it is, between existence and essence, is indeed an abstract one. It is the same which, in the analysis of the judgment, is made between the *subject* (apprehension, existence) and the *predicate* (interpretation, essence)—two terms which become inconceivable if we attempt, in actuality, to separate them and to think each apart from the other. For the subject is only a certain subject insofar as it is the subject of a certain predicate, and the predicate a certain predicate insofar as it is the predicate of a certain subject. If the subject is separated from its predicate, it does not remain there unaltered as a pure subject. It either falls outside thought or remains united to some other predicate (whether implied or explicit does not matter) more general than that from which it was separated. In actual thinking, whenever there is a subject there is a predicate. To think of a thing is to make a judgment which always implies some synthesis of the two correlative terms—the subject and the predicate.

On the other hand, in order to point to a fact, it is necessary that this fact reveal itself to us in some particular form, with certain properties which allow us to recognize it as the individual fact in question, distinct from others. Without a primary and rudimentary cognition which distinguishes the fact by characterizing and defining it (thus involving a certain degee of interpretation), there is neither apprehension of fact nor possibility of setting up an inquiry, for there is nothing to inquire about.

Furthermore, what could be the second stage of interpretation which claims to be, in actuality, distinguished from apprehension, if not the *development* of the first stage of the interpretation? Development implies not only difference, but also identity. Unless the subsequent interpretation, besides being different, were substantially identical with the previous interpretation implied in the original apprehension, it would have gone astray and missed its mark. It would no longer bear any relation to that truth of fact which governs it.

In conclusion, the fact is always the object of both apprehension and interpretation, and it presents itself as a definite being, that is, a being having a definite essence. And the fact, which is the content of apprehension, gradually transforms itself through the very process of apprehension as the correlative process of interpretation develops. We can never point to a fact as being beyond question. The fact allegedly beyond question cannot be but a fact already interpreted, that is, virtually defined, whose definition can be analyzed and amended. For if, during the process of interpretation, which is to lead to the desired definition, the first and provisional definitions prove one by one to be unsatisfactory and have to reappear in a new shape, then it must be said that the fact to which the final definition applies is not the fact presupposed from the beginning to be once and for all given and beyond question. Whenever criticism proves a definition to be false, it thereby denies and disproves the existence of the fact which that definition implied. Such criticism makes thought aware that it had not, at the beginning, adequately apprehended the fact which, at first glance, it had presumed to take as the solid foundation on which to build.

All this does not mean that we must not start from a fact, but simply that we cannot start from a fact which is not a concept; a conclusive investigation, on purely empirical grounds, would seem possible only if things are viewed in a broad and superficial way.

3. *The Immediacy of Knowledge as Knowledge of Facts*

All this seems very obvious, and to insist on it may be thought a waste of time. Yet the odds are that no empiricist or man of science will surrender to the force of such considerations, however evident. For no man will ever yield to another man's reasoning (even if well founded), until he has ceased to regard the force of reason as being merely someone else's point of view. Now the empirical point of view adopted by every man of science is, as we have said, that the object of knowledge exists before man comes to know it, and that in this sense it is a fact. From this point of view, we perhaps agree that the fact cannot be separated from the concept; but the empiricist will quickly point out that it is not the fact which depends on the concept but the concept which depends on the fact. In other words, the further we go in the interpretative process, the more we know about the object apprehended; but the justification of the interpretative process lies in the apprehended fact, which is something immediate, always preceding the subjective work of thought. Thus it can stimulate thought and drive it to feel the necessity of a more adequate interpretation, closer and closer to the fact. Accordingly, thought does not become more and more subjective as it leaves the fact behind and advances toward the concept of it; rather it only attains the concept when, by rising above its own subjectivity, it causes it to coincide with the objectivity of the apprehension. In short, all the analysis, description, observation, performed by thought is only a deeper penetration into the fact and a real confirmation of our apprehension in the light of a richer, more precise, and more detailed knowledge. All this, I repeat, is precisely the logic of the abstract. All thought returns to its starting point thus making truth, which is either all or nothing, a closed circle. We are again where we started.

For if truth can be apprehended only in its totality, thought, insofar as it possesses the truth and value belonging to its nature, must be as immediate as apprehension, that is, a simple intuition of a pre-existing object for the sole purpose of identifying itself with the object, whose nature is, as we saw, wholly and immediately determined. But, however alluring the charms of immediate knowledge, those who fall in love with it cannot escape certain dangers. And the danger is that, if truth lies in the immediate apprehension or intuition, one may be left like a fool ogling an object which cannot be touched, or, to speak less vulgarly, in the awkward situation of Tantalus. For whatever sophisms we may devise about such an object, from which thought cannot take its eyes without slipping into error, they are simply futile. The best we can do is to keep silent and to stop thinking, that is to say, to lapse into nothingness. And perhaps this is the final aim of the empiricist who proposes to carry the method of the particular sciences into esthetics.

The truth is that the so-called self-evident facts are no longer so, or rather fall short of being so, if we content ourselves with the halfhearted reflection which begins the elaboration of a concept without completing it, and takes instead a look in every direction, at one moment considering such a concept as distinct from another with which it was perhaps meant to be contrasted, at the next mixing this concept with a negligible element taken from another, so that, as soon as the distinction and the contrast turn out to be inconvenient, they can be dropped. Thus if we speak of a fact, we mean also the concept of a fact; and the concept which is not recognized is no longer a concept, since the better part of its value has gone out of it and taken refuge in the fact. It is all more or less conscious trickery, against which rigorous philosophy must be ever on its guard in order to dispel confusion.

No concept, in short, is fixed and confined to one clear meaning. It is only by sophistic devices that thought dwells satisfied in the empirical position of its problems. Yet there are philosophers who argue in favor of such a position on which they elaborate the doctrine of empiricism. But we cannot rely on such a doctrine, as we have seen. We must come to realize that on this ground it is impossible to state the problem of art and even more so to solve it.

4. *Impossibility of Stating the Problem of Art from the Empirical Point of View*

All the same, let us suppose, however wild the hypothesis, that the problem of art could be solved and therefore stated empirically. What would be the value of a solution thus achieved? It is easy to deduce its character, given the terms in which empiricism, by its own logic, states the problem. The fundamental presupposition of empiricism is, as we have pointed out, that knowledge is conditioned by the reality to be known, that is, by all the facts which all together make up nature. It does not matter whether these facts are considered to be strictly natural because they appear in space, or whether they are considered, in a superficial sense, to be spiritual because they appear in time. Empiricism, once more, is naturalism, even if some empiricists refuse to discuss metaphysical questions and profess ignorance of the essence of things which are beyond experience. Naturalism need not be a metaphysical conception of reality; it needs only to suppose that phenomena, whether natural or spiritual, are governed by a certain order which leads thought to conceive the latter as conditioned by the former and every phenomenon in each series as conditioned by its antecedents. This is in fact the system which distinguishes nature from spirit. If the order of phenomena is necessary, that is, essential not only for each phenomenon but for the universal system of phenomena, then reality, whether metaphysically or phenomenally conceived, is that definite and immutable reality in which the inflexible necessity of the system is brought about by the inflexible necessity of each element. Such is the naturalism of Spinoza, the most coherent thinker along these lines. And such is the naturalism underlying the mental attitude of every empiricist and indeed of every man of science who works within naturalistic limits.

But it is well known that to hold a naturalistic conception of reality is to abandon as illusory and inconsistent the very idea of the spirit from whose experience the problem of art arises. Nowhere in the experience that all men have of spiritual life do they feel so vividly, as they do in art, the reality and the power of the spirit—a reality which manifests itself as power. It is the power which makes man, born the weakest of all natural creatures and exposed to the greatest danger of perishing in a hostile environment, into the lord and arbiter of nature. For, thanks to his intelligence and his will, he knows and masters even the most murderous forces; reveals the secrets of nature, and avails himself of its innermost energies to increase his power day by day and to extend his sway incessantly. He multiplies the means for satisfying his needs, which in their turn multiply in direct ratio to the satisfaction received, and, in short, asserts the ever more uncontested and incontestable will incarnate in him. And so man is tempted by the miracle of his intelligence to make himself equal to God and to lay claim to the same creative powers by which God made the world out of nothing. And indeed, besides the world created by God, there is the other—that of civilization—which man created out of nothing. Does he not, as a spiritual being whose work develops through generations and centuries and ages, continually create this world from nothingness by his unwearying thought, by his discoveries and inventions? Does he not create it by finding and solving new problems, by new expedients and new sciences, new arts, and ever new and more human, more spiritual institutions; by war and peace and ceaseless struggle, which to weary minds seem useless and insane?

Those who turn their eyes to the marvelous spectacle of this second nature created by the human spirit cannot help feeling vaguely that in man, too, there must be something divine, for he can create civilization and gradually by his labors transform the original nature. When subsequent reflection tries to give some account of this divinity in man, this Promethean spark which is the beginning of civilized life, and to reconcile this with so many dissimilar ideas about man's finitude and the infinite Being to which he compares himself, the difficulties of clarifying in what sense and within what limits the human spirit deserves this highest attribute of creative power are indeed great. We realize at once that we cannot detect the mark of the creative spirit in man's work unless we shut our eyes to the material and natural means he uses (which he could not create), unless we confine ourselves to seeking in the things of the spirit their human essence and origin. But even in this field, which is itself infinite, it is hard to persuade ourselves, on mature reflection, that man can build anything out of his own resources without some basis provided him by that Power which infinitely transcends his limited capacity. Man is too much concerned with assuring himself at least of the absolute value of truth and goodness to which his thought and will must conform, to believe easily that he is himself the creator of either. He knows too well that he is subject to error; he has too often to confess that again and again he is both hopelessly ignorant of truth and sadly defective in the necessary strength to bear the burden which God has laid upon him and to do the good that is his duty. Truth and goodness, from which he draws the norms for his thinking and action, are eternal: man perceives them before and above himself in the dazzling brightness of their infinite value, and feels himself bound to them and unable to do without them.

Let us grant for the moment that all those logical and moral truths, on which civilization is built up, fall outside the scope of man's creative power; let us allow, for the sake of argument, that without some help from above, whatever it may be, men cannot find in themselves the source of that truth and goodness which give light and warmth to their lives; yet, in every age, men have never doubted that they had some sort of creative power capable of bringing a world into being, not indeed solid and stable as reality itself, but such as to be an image of the real world. They have felt a power to create men and things, not exactly similar to the natural men and things created by God, yet worthy to be compared with them. These were the works of art, not of mechanical art, which always requires the cooperation of nature, but of fine art—expression of the spiritual activity productive of immaterial phantoms, altogether ideal, which have no place in the world of experience. Yet in their own ideal world they reveal themselves to the spirit as endowed with a value of their own which demands recognition and compels assent and admiration as something eternal. This is the value which makes us call these phantoms things of beauty and apprehend them with that delight which is never satisfied. They are phantoms which take on the form of words and songs, of lines or colors, and of plastic or geometrical shapes, but their life is superior to and independent of the material means by which they express themselves in order to come before our sense-perception. For their ideal substantiality, for the life which animates them and draws us into their orbit, and for the delight we take in dwelling on them, we call such phantoms creations of genius. For genius generates them spontaneously and launches them into the infinite world of things ideal and eternal. It is a strange power whereby man visibly enriches and adorns the harsh reality to which he is born and where he can only live by submitting himself painfully to the laws immanent in that reality. It is a power that leads us naturally to think of some divine inspiration which raises man far above his own nature. It moves our hearts to reverence the privileged souls who, by their phantoms, help us to liberate our minds from the tragic round of daily reality and to expatiate freely in an ideal world of aspiration, where there is no hunger or thirst, no rumors of war or terrors of storm and darkness, and no more tears or death.

Through art man, who is never free or master of himself in the world of experience, assuages his innate need and longing to live in an infinite world where his will roves freely. It is hard not to see in the artist a free creative spirit. No doubt there are difficulties for the common man to come to a clear understanding of this creative power. But, however dim, the idea of the artist who creates a world of his own is deeply rooted in every man who has approached a work of art and felt his heart leap up within his breast at the sight of beauty.

Now creation means liberty. If we weigh well the general implications of the idea of any spiritual activity whatever, we cannot but reach the idea of the universal creative power of the spirit, which must therefore be considered free in every degree and form of its manifestations. The spirit in fact, both in art and outside it, lives and develops on a way which always offers two paths so that at every moment it must choose the right one —not the path which it is driven or impelled to take by forces outside itself, but the one which it chooses for itself, freely, of its own initiative, because it is the best and the only way for it to go. For to take the wrong path would be to exchange truth for error, beauty for ugliness, good for evil, in short to exchange the positive aspect of the spirit, which enhances its life, for the negative aspect, which merely diminishes it. If this were not so, if we turned to the right or left by mere momentum, one way would be as good as the other and we would deserve neither praise nor blame for taking either. The positive term would be such only in relation to the negative term; the negative, then, would not contain in itself its negativity, and each term could be called either the positive or the negative of the other. This would imply the impossibility not only of making that absolute distinction between what has value and what has not (a distinction on which reasoning, action, and art depend), but even of opening our mouth. For those who speak always choose a word which they feel is the right one and which they prefer absolutely to all the others; they must have the power to choose and to utter it, that is, to be free.

Of course, to judge by the use which the human spirit often, if not always, makes of its freedom, we have a good reason to doubt what its freedom amounts to. But the point of view of those who make such an observation is not one from which freedom could be visible. It is a point of view which judges actions, whether our own or another's, from outside and after they are over and done with. But actions once accomplished are facts already given their place in that system which is called the world of experience or nature, where freedom does not flourish. We are able to speak of these past actions, or of any other fact, because, besides the facts, there is the spirit which examines them and to which they stand in an essential, inseparable relation. If we want to see these actions—accomplished and done with—as they really are and effectively exist, we must transfer ourselves within the consciousness of the spirit which is judging them. There and only there is the reality of these actions and the whole of reality. If we ask the man who is judging the said actions what he thinks precisely about the judgment which he is now making, whether he thinks it is free, he cannot apply the same verdict to his act of judging as he does to the actions he pronounces unfree. It is very well to assert that other people, and perhaps himself in the past, may not have known what they were doing or saying. But what about himself now?

The problem is to take the right point of view. Once that is taken, it is simply impossible to deny the fundamental truth that the life of the spirit, in art as well as in every form of its activity, is free.

And consequently it is equally impossible to solve the problem of art on any empirical ground, except by denying the existence of art. To the empiricist, if he consistently thinks out the logic of his beliefs, any spiritual reality in which art could find a place is an absurdity.

5. *The Empiricism of Pseudo Idealist Esthetics*

A test of the truth of the preceding section, in some ways a very significant one, can be found in a recent well-known doctrine of art. This doctrine, while professing to be inspired by absolute idealism, begins with an empirical statement of the esthetic problem and, as a result, never succeeds in escaping the denial of art implicit in such a statement, except by recourse to the most irrational dogmatism.

If we open Croce's *Aesthetic* we read at the beginning: "Knowledge has two forms: it is either *intuitive* or *logical;* either *imaginative* or *intellectual;* either knowledge of the *individual* or knowledge of the *universal;* either of *single things* or of their relation; in short it produces either *images* or *concepts*." Of course this intuitive knowledge is meant to be art. And after illustrating and exemplifying his assertion by a number of observations drawn from common sense, this is how the author summarizes his thought at the beginning of the second chapter: "We have unreservedly identified intuitive or expressive knowledge with the esthetic fact, and taken works of art as examples of intuitive knowledge."[2]

The whole of the *Aesthetic* is constructed on these grounds—grounds plainly empirical where everything is a fact *beyond question*. It is a fact that there is such a thing as knowledge and that it has two forms; it is a fact that there is an intuitive knowledge and a logical knowledge, a knowledge of the individual and another supposedly of the universal; it is a fact that there are single things unrelated and also relations among things, with a special form of knowledge for each. Yet, indeed, even these facts are very questionable and ought not to be assumed as facts until their concepts have been defined and justified. That is to say, they are not *facts* at all. To this objection—that his facts are not facts, and that they cannot be beyond question until they have been questioned, and that they can only be questioned on the basis of a logical theory of knowledge—the author, after much reflection, comes out with the usual reply of all empiricists, but disguised in the form of a satire: "Problem of knowledge? A relic of theologizing philosophy!" Well, what harm in that? In what new decalogue of philosophy is theology proscribed? We must distinguish between one god and another. There is the god of theology, who was beheaded by Kant; and there is the god of philosophy; one is transcendent, the other immanent. Well, and what is this immanence which is contrasted with transcendence? How, with what logic or what theory of knowledge, will you explain it, if every theory of the kind smells of theologizing philosophy? And if transcendence and immanence are not two "distincts," to use your own words, but two "opposites," a positive and a negative, must you not yourself admit that the truth lies neither in the one nor the other but in the synthesis of the two? Why, then, this sneer at theologizing philosophy?[3]

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[2] *Aesthetic*, p. 15.

It would be better and much clearer to state just how things stand. The empiricist does not recognize a theory of knowledge or logic, because from the point of view of logic, thought dictates laws to so-called reality; empiricism, on the contrary, leads us to think that so-called reality (which is a reality immediately intuited, given to the spirit, not constructed by it) dictates laws to thought. In this case, thought opens its eyes, looks, and sees something vaguely. And what does it see? Perhaps it sees particular things and at once knows that it knows particular things without universality, without relations. And what does it do next? What can the poor little thought do when it is empty and has no logic or any kind of reason to guide it to think truly? What can it do but tell us what it sees? So it sees that there are works of art and, as we have heard, it says: "Here is the *fact of art!*"

But where must we take our stand if we want to see this *fact?* There is no answer, for it is impossible to answer: "On intuitive knowledge," because the fact of art has been identified with the fact of intuition, which is therefore not a concept but itself primarily a fact. And how are we to see this fact? Where are we to look for it?

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[3] Immanence and transcendence are not a positive and a negative, as Croce would appear to hold, and with him the orthodox Catholic theologians. Immanence is the synthesis.

All these questions, as we know, seem pointless to the empiricist. There is for him the fact; he sees it and that is enough. It is enough because everything that can be spoken of is for him the subject matter of thought for the very reason that it exists independently of thought. There is the fact of art and the fact of science, or better, philosophy. And there is a third fact, that of economics; and a fourth, that of morality. And these four facts are four sides or aspects of a single fact, the spirit, which is itself a fact. And as in esthetics we get a description of the aspect under which the spirit reveals itself as art, so, step by step, we get a description of the whole. And when the description is finished we can say: "Here is the Universe in a nutshell." That it is in no way material is agreed, because outside this alleged fact we can see nothing, however much we may look. But what authority do we have for saying that this is the Universe? Again there is no reply but silence, because what is wanted is some theory of self-consciousness, something like the Hegelian logic of the concept. Nonsense, this is theologizing philosophy! The best that can be said is that, besides the fact seen, there is the fact of seeing, which is within the fact seen, for it too has a fine name of its own and therefore a pigeonhole in one of the four forms or *grades* of the spirit. And there it takes its place as a particular within the universal, as an individual instance within the concept, and not as itself concept (self-concept), that is, as the Universal by its own rights. For there is always the individual fact and the universal which is itself no less a fact (the *law* of "scientific philosophy"). Everything is a fact, as the old-fashioned positivists used to say, with their easy-going empirical frame of mind—a frame of mind which this naïve dogmatic idealism adopts with startling candor and reinvigorates with audacious exaggerations and intellectualistic systematism.[4]

The author of this pseudo philosophy is certainly clear-sighted and sharp-eyed, and, as a result, he has had bright glimpses of many truths which have been considered to be discoveries, and which explain the success and popularity of his *Aesthetic.* We shall have occasion here to call attention to them. But thinking is something more than seeing, for seeing is but a rudimentary kind of unsystematic thought, lacking guidance and logical power. So we see what we can and not what we ought, and we are bound to work upon shifting and unsure foundations, because the object to be seen is not determined and fixed.

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[4] See the attempt to deduce the various forms of the spirit in the *Philosophy of the Practical.*

In the whole of Croce's *Aesthetic*, once it has been established as we have described, namely, that besides logical knowledge there is intuition and art, and that these last two, on close inspection, are identical, we find no definition of this unique art or intuition. We shall see later that this unique activity is also identified with language. However, of this unique activity, which is a mere point, an immediate knowledge or apprehension, and therefore itself an intuition, nothing is said or can be said. The very brief discussion does nothing to develop the conception of art or intuition except watch it, allowing nothing foreign to approach or mingle with the object so observed and distinguished. The discussion is destructive, not constructive; an analysis of errors, but not of the truth, which, being existence and not essence, escapes analysis. It is not to say that the author passes over completely the essence of art, but simply that all he says is implied in the first statement which acknowledges the fact. There is no reasoning, no demonstration. All is presupposed. The essence (to use terms already explained) is lost in the existence, according to the logic of empiricism which we have explained.

And what is the result? The result is precisely what we should expect, namely, that this fact, presupposed but never demonstrated, never thought out, is always exposed to the danger of falling into nothingness and disappearing forever. The author, with all the harsh dogmatism of the empiricists, always stands fully armed in the front line, ready to challenge all who question the existence of art. But his weapons are strictures and censures and gibes at those who do not *feel* art, those who do not *see*, those who, to their shame, have no eyes to see, and instead devote themselves to philosophy, logic, and theology. As we all know, these are the very weapons used by the artist against those who do not see the beauty of art, by which he means his art, which for him is the only art, that is, Art! They are, indeed, the weapons of a man who has not yet reached the problem, has not even formulated it. So when he thinks he has defeated his enemies and is in possession of the field, he still has all his work before him.

With all this, the author none the less, as I have pointed out, professes his adherence to idealism, which he declares to be the only philosophy worthy of the name, although such a philosophy is inconsistent with his leaning to the empirical method. And not only does he fight in the ranks of the idealists, but he is one of their staunchest defenders. There is no attack against empiricism or related doctrines in which he does not take the lead. Empirical ideas current among scientists, historians, philologists, men of letters, and third-rate philosophers have been his butt for the last thirty years. They have been attacked and routed with such energy and success as to bewilder and confound the unphilosophical and the less sophisticated philosophers, who were fascinated by the cleverness and wide range of his criticism which encompassed fields of culture long abandoned by philosophy. No philosopher ever had so keen a scent for the empirical method or showed himself so dogged and relentless in running it down. The words *thought*, *ideas*, *philosophy*, *logic* have always been on his lips!

But philosophy does not deserve the name unless it be identified with the reality; otherwise reality, which, too, is thought, would be a thought outside thought. We would have, therefore, two thoughts and not the unique thought that must be taken seriously. There are professional philosophers who pride themselves on a technique of thinking which may or may not apply to reality, but which they elaborate without reference to the things, the life, the reality it should apply to, convinced that such a technique will enable those who concern themselves with reality to think exactly and profitably. The author I have mentioned has finally persuaded himself that philosophy should be a mere methodology of historical thought, the very thought which deals with actual reality. But if this were so, philosophy would plainly be reduced to a technique external to that real life in which all our serious interests and the source of our thought lie. The very position of such a philosophy shows that, far from being, as it claims, a substitute for religion (religion is something inside and not outside life), it cannot even expect to be a part of life at all, as are religion, art, and action.

A pseudo philosophy like this, defined as methodology and therefore condemned, as philosophy, to remain forever on the doorstep of the problem, may be called intellectualist in the bad sense, that is, in the sense that the intellect, taken as the purely theoretical faculty of thought, presupposes as a condition of its activity the existence of the whole thinkable reality. Consequently it remains outside of reality and cannot produce anything, since nothing can be produced in a void.

Empiricism, which characterizes the philosophy we mentioned, is the result of the intellectualistic nature of such a philosophy. Its claim to be an *idealist philosophy* is, therefore, false. Compared with other empirical doctrines and by their standards, it certainly is a kind of idealism, since it does not believe in any reality which is not spiritual. But the idea it gives of this spiritual reality is itself empirical and therefore naturalistic. This is shown when we rise from the intellectualistic considerations proper to philosophy defined as methodology or technique, to the considerations proper to a philosophy which is no mere abstract thought of reality, but reality itself thinking, or reality as thought. The doctrine we have been describing is indeed the idealism of empirical thought, but not the idealism of philosophical thought.

III

The Philosophical Problem

1. *The Distinction and the Unity of the Forms of the Spirit*

The problem of art then can be stated and solved only by philosophy. This is not so extravagant a claim as it would at first seem if we take philosophy, as it is usually taken, to be the topmost story of the edifice which thought relentlessly builds and rebuilds, a kind of watchtower from where we can view the horizon denied to the tenants of the lower stories.

But one of the first prejudices, from which philosophy must free us, is that of the existence of various stories or departments or chambers in the mansion of the spirit, all of them connected with each other and accessible, but each separate and distinct and occupying a place of its own. This is a materialistic prejudice; for only in the material world can one imagine a multiplicity of things which can be separated or joined, but not fused in a fundamental unity immanent in each. Only in the material world can one imagine a class of professional philosophers as distinguished from other classes of men belonging to other professions; only from a materialistic point of view can one distinguish functions, activities or forms of spiritual life *succeeding* one another (in time if not in space) so that the one which follows can only be reached through the one which precedes and the preceding can never be found in the following. It is well known that an error of this kind was made by Vico, who was an enthusiastic champion of "pure mind," free of the thought embodied by a materializing imagination, and who never tired of warning us against the danger of man's fancy. Owing to this error he conceived of three stages of the spirit—sense, imagination, reason—which he regarded as not merely ideal but actually historical, through which civilization successively passes and repasses. Such an error is always possible until we attain the correct concept of spiritual life as present and actual life. So long as the life of the spirit is regarded from outside, as it always is, except when we consider it in its living activity, it takes on the appearance of a totality resulting from the coordination of elements, each of which remains distinct from all the others.

But philosophy can only ideally be distinguished within the living unity of the spirit. The analysis of this unity, which is a deductive analysis, exhibits types and forms of thought which are not philosophy, and leads us to distinguish them from philosophical thought. And through this distinction we are enabled to define exactly the nature of what is called philosophical thinking. But we come across a bit of spirit which is philosophy, and other bits which are art, science, morals, religion, and so on. Rather, what we find is always a synthesis, a convergence and concurrence of the various forms in an inseparable unity, full, organic, and harmonious, which is the spiritual reality. This synthesis is necessary because it is intrinsically implied in all the elements that enter into it, for these elements cannot be conceived abstractly, that is, outside the fundamental system of the synthesis. Thus, *in primis et ante omnia* there is the unity, from which the different forms will spring. If the fundamental principle of the unity is left in mystery, we may describe all the forms one by one: they may be three or four, or, for all I know, five or six or a hundred. We may collect all the descriptions we have made, but we shall be left face to face with the mystery. We may gaze at the tree and admire the fruits that blush among the green foliage; we may even count them; but what can we know of them, of their origin and growth, of the life which has gradually developed them from one seed through the whole course of the plant's vegetative process?

The distinction must be made within the synthesis and without losing sight of the fundamental principle which is unity, whatever may be thought by those who are eaten up with the zeal of distinction (in our times the prophets of false distinction multiply like mushrooms in the fat soil of philosophical journalism, with its quick production and quick return). Without the plant deeply rooted in the soil, from which it draws its vital sap, without the living plant and the organic principle of its life, there can be no real fruit but only imitations.

So philosophy is neither the tenant of the top-floor apartment or, perhaps, the loft, as shallow minds would have it, nor is it the nurse of old age. It was born with man, if indeed it was not born before him, and is the constant inspiration of his thoughts and actions, the secret of his innermost life. For, of course, there is the philosophy of the philosopher and the philosophy of the common man, the philosophy of the adult and the philosophy of the child.

All this may perhaps seem to contradict the contention in the preceding chapter that empiricism is not philosophy. But the contradiction disappears if we distinguish between empiricism and the empiricist, between those ideas into which men unreflectively allow themselves to be hurried or ensnared, and the spiritual life which the same men actually manage to realize. Systems may be false; thought is always true; and therefore it grows by bursting its way out through the hard rind in which every system tries to confine it. The empiricist does not live on his system, but in spite of it. Thus, he contradicts himself. He succeeds in putting into many of his particular thoughts and words the truth of which he has caught a glimpse, which is the life that burns within himself and the power of his thought—the life that cannot allow itself to be contracted and compressed within the system. If there were no perpetual contrast between thought and thinking, every thought, once defined, would become like a stagnant, pestilent pool, where all life would sooner or later perish.

So it is true that every philosopher is always tending to become enchained in the pedantry of his system; but so long as he lives he has that advantage over his system which Plato ascribed in the *Phaedrus* to the oral discourse over the written. Every philosopher is worth more than his philosophy; for, inasmuch as he is a man he has within himself something richer and more vital than what is called, because he has expressed it, his philosophy.

2. *The Empirical Distinction of Theory and Practice*

This is not the place to identify or deduce the forms of the spirit which philosophy distinguishes from itself and with which it makes up the wealth of spiritual life. We must at this point reach some sort of understanding on the meaning of this word. We have already often spoken of "philosophy," assuming a certain agreement with the reader as to its meaning, which must now be ascertained. Thus we must outline our idea of the philosophy which we consider to be born with man. In order to have a good start, we should not be stuck with what is and what is not in the human spirit. We must not say that at one time man thinks and at another he acts; nor, consequently, that a part of his life is a theoretical activity, aimed only at knowing what already exists (whether produced by his own activity or that of others), and that another part is a practical activity, aimed not at knowing but at doing, producing something which was not there before and would never be there but for his action. This is a popular distinction and rather handy for the man who inquires about the nature of philosophy, which, as we well know, is commonly considered to be a science among others, perhaps the highest (within the limits of rational knowledge), or the science of sciences. But such a distinction between thinking and doing, which seems so clear and obvious, so alluring to human passions and to weaknesses of human nature, plunges into a jungle of thorny difficulties as soon as it is closely scrutinized. One might enumerate dozens of these difficulties; but two, which are perhaps the most important, will be enough for our purpose.

The first is this. In order to produce anything spontaneously, the spirit, as we have seen, must be free, that is, unconditioned. But if the spirit, besides being practical activity, is also theoretical activity, the implication is that there is something apart from the spirit, on which it depends at least as theoretical activity. But if, beside the spirit, there is something else, then the spirit is conditioned. Hence it is not free and it can never really do anything. We may add that this "something else," which the theoretical activity of the spirit presupposes outside itself, is not just something, but the whole or everything; for even Monsieur de la Palisse would admit that there can be nothing outside the knowable universe; nothing which is not an actual or possible object of knowledge. So, in conclusion, if everything is external to the theoretical activity of the spirit, the spirit itself is not only not free, it is nonexistent.

The other difficulty arises from the impossibility of giving any consistent meaning to the act of knowing when opposed to that of doing. For the product of action, which alone, by all evidence, can be ascribed to practical action, is not anything external to the active spirit, but absolutely identical with it. Good and evil are in the very will which produces them, which realizes itself as a good or bad will. What the spirit creates is the spirit itself; its creation is self-creation. But if all that differentiates the practical from the theoretical spirit is reduced, as it seems that it ought to be, to this self-creation, then the boundary fades and disappears. If we want to maintain it, we must deny that knowledge can bring about a change of state in the spirit, the passage from one condition to another. But if such a denial is absurd, as indeed it is, then we must admit that the so-called theoretical spirit is self-creative in exactly the same way that was considered characteristic of the practical spirit. Indeed, this distinction, until its collapse, rested on a purely mechanical and materialistic conception of creative activity. Hence the search for the effects or traces of action in the physical world where it seems impossible to find any trace of thought, where action, conceived of as having its origin in a pure spiritual activity, is finally ending in the physical reality that it modifies. But, as every moralist knows, such a concept is now definitely abandoned.

3. *Thought as the Thinking Act*

Let us begin with something simpler and less questionable, which is not a fact, or at any rate a mere fact. This "something," which is not a fact and which has the unique character of being unquestionable, is: —that we think. I mean *we*, who are now looking for a first principle from which to start. Every time that we are conscious of proposing a problem to ourselves, we think. Our thinking is a fact. But, while every other fact presupposes our thinking to apprehend and affirm it, our thinking is quite other than the fact itself and can exist without the fact, being independent of the existence or nonexistence of it. This fact of our thinking presupposes nothing but itself. If no other fact can be produced or destroyed by our thought, our thought exists so long as we are thinking; thought is, therefore, self-created.

All this is as clear as daylight, but it is not all. Any other fact is different from the thought which apprehends it; therefore, thought is independent of it. This implies that the fact appears to thought as contingent: it exists because it is there, but it might also not exist, while thought would exist none the less. On the contrary, the fact of our thought, being a product of our thinking, implies that this fact is not, like all others, contingent, and so not properly a fact at all. It is not contingent because thought cannot be without its product, namely, the fact that there is thinking. Thought is a fact, if you will, but a necessary fact: a product which is also the act of producing, that is, the very creative act of the thought which produces it. And because it is properly a creating, not a creature—a fact—, it is better to call it an act.

The first principle, the simplest, the most necessary, and the least questionable, is the *act of thinking*. To deny this is to obliterate all else. If we cut away from all that we think, from every object of our thought, this basis, namely, the thought which thinks it, all vanishes in a bottomless abyss. Nothing could be more absurd than this supposed denial of the act of thinking, for the very denial would itself have to be an act of thinking.

However, when we speak of act, if we intend to stress its absolute necessity and original character, we must be scrupulously careful not to confuse the act which is an object of thinking with the act of thinking itself. I have insisted on this point *ad nauseam* in the writings which I have published on the subject during the last fifteen years. I admit that philosophers, who are usually not very patient readers, may have exhausted on this point their little stock of patience and may refuse to hear another word about it.[1] Yet if a poor fellow keeps on saying "white," and sees that those who are listening think he says "black," what can he do but protest once more that he is saying "white," not "black," and politely but firmly beg them to keep their ears open, or else it would be useless for him to go on?

So, what I am talking about is not the act of which we think, but the thinking act; not the act of which we can speak in the third person, but the act which, whatever phrase we may adopt, allows of the first person only. So long as we consider this act of thinking as if it were an object of thinking, and therefore opposed to thinking, we cannot call it original and necessary. In fact, a great part of man's thinking life is spent without giving any thought to that act or making it an object of thinking. Once the act is taken as an object thought of, then clearly what must be original in relation to this object is the new thought of which it becomes the object; and for the man who is now thinking of it, necessity belongs to his present thinking act but not to the object on which his thinking is directed.

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[1] They are impatient readers because reading is for the sake of understanding, and every philosopher has his own system, which is the method of thinking he must dispense with before he begins to understand the reasoning of another man. But this intermission of one's own system is neither easy nor pleasant.

The celebrated Cartesian *Cogito* loses all its force and truth when it is changed, as it was by Spinoza, to *homo cogitat*. This is a mere accidental fact, something limited and subjective, from which, as Spinoza justly observes, it is impossible to deduce the truth of the existence of God.

I know very well that to reduce all reality, and the basis of all reality strictly understood, to the ego which realizes itself in its momentary act, fills many minds with dismay. They think that we are trying to suspend the universe by a hair which the slightest shock can snap. But, whatever the impatience or dismay, no base and petty passion, worthy only of weak and hysterical minds, must distract us from following vigorously the path on which logical thinking leads us. And we need not go far on that path to see that this ego, which is my ego and the ego of every thinking being, whether his thought be great or small, is not a finite and subjective ego. It is not a particular, transitory ego of vulgar imagination, which is materialistically conceived as one among many, one of the objects of experience which together form the so-called world. Oh, no! This ego, properly understood, has more than Atlantean shoulders. Nothing is outside it, everything derives from it. It is, of course, and yet it is not, that particular ego which every man assigns to himself and to every other. This ego thinks in us and is our essence, the principle of our life; and it reveals and manifests itself in our thinking just so far as we think.

Finally, as I have said more than once, it is the thought which is the act of thinking, the act in its unfolding; not an act conceived, defined, generalized.

4. *The Primary Character of Absolute Thought*

It will be clear that this is not the thought dealt with by psychological theories. All of these repeat the story of the skyscrapers—buildings of many stories on the highest of which thought dwells in its full and perfect form; and such thought is neither mere sensation, nor representation, but concept logic, and altogether clear consciousness and self-consciousness, that is, all that thought can be when it has reached its full development, anticipated and partially prepared by the lower stages. We must stress that there is really only one story: what we find at the end was where from the very beginning, organically connected and unified in the life of the spirit.

So we may, if we like, speak of sensation. But is this sensation supposed to be a psychic state below consciousness? Certainly not. Below consciousness there is no psychic state; we lack the background against which we could shape up and bring to the fore the images of what we call our inner world. The physiologist may be satisfied with such an unconscious sensation, which he brings within the sphere of physiological phenomena. But an alert psychologist will smile at this, for he knows, or should know, that whatever the physiologist brings within his domain is, as is the domain itself, an object of thought, an object of experience, a complex of images, and therefore essentially sensations, but conscious ones. It is then a matter of quantity; from the qualitative point of view the sensation is consciousness itself.

But that is not all. What do we mean by consciousness? The mere internality of a psychic condition is not self-evident. If a certain form of my being is not an unconscious but a conscious state, and therefore *my* state, then in this consciousness there must be, however dim and underdeveloped, a distinction between my self and my state—a distinction which makes possible the claim that it is my state. Consciousness of anything is, therefore, a double consciousness—consciousness of myself and consciousness of something distinguished from myself. Even the consciousness of myself is already double; for in order to perceive myself and to be aware of it, I must perceive myself as being other than the thing of which I am conscious, so that I may be called the subject, and the thing the object, of consciousness. So consciousness of myself or self-consciousness is consciousness of myself as an element correlative to the consciousness of something, that is, the consciousness of myself as the subject of consciousness of something. In other words, I perceive myself as an active being whose activity is consciousness. And if the object of consciousness is a thing, the object of self-consciousness is an activity.

When we come to self-consciousness, in fact, activity is both the object and the subject of consciousness. The thought which moves within us is seen as an activity conscious of itself and consisting in the passing from unconsciousness to self-consciousness. This activity is not mere contemplation or passive theory, but knowledge and will. Nor is it a representation or a concept, but a positive activity which, by the assertive act proper to every activity of consciousness, will posit its object. This object, depending on its relations with other objects, will appear as a representation or as a concept, but it will always be the appropriate product of a given moment of the activity. This activity will set up the product before itself, without distinguishing it from itself, but distinguishing it within itself by a development which, in its absolute logical form, is not a judgment, but a syllogism; that is, not an accidental relation between the subject and the predicate, but a necessary relation, demonstrated as such. To be conscious of *A* is to posit *A* before self-consciousness and within self-consciousness. But to posit *A* is to know it, and to know is to judge, and to judge is to syllogize.[2] The true, solid, absolute syllogistic process is the assimilation and unification of the abstract syllogism of the thing thought with the real syllogism of the thinking subject,[3] and returning again to the starting point. This will be exemplified in the subject matter of this book.

There is in thought no development which implies the progressive taking on of forms more and more adequate to the true nature of thought. The whole organism is already in the germ which develops concomitantly all the functions and organs, with which it was completely endowed from the beginning.

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[2] See *Sistema di logica*, vol. I, part II, chap. 6.

[3] *Sistema di logica*, vol. II, part III.

5. The Abstractness of Any Classification of the Forms of the Spirit

This origin of all the forms of the spirit from that absolute principle which is the act of thinking gives meaning to our contention that philosophy was born with man. If all the forms which it is possible to distinguish in the life of the spirit are arranged in logical sequence, philosophy appears as the highest and final one, beyond which nothing can be imagined that answers to any exigency of the spirit. I say logical sequence because we are concerned here with an order of concepts, not a historical order—and the two orders cannot be interchanged or identified without lamentable confusion.

In terms of exact logic one may say that the logical sequence belongs to abstract thinking in which concepts can be defined and verified by the principle of noncontradiction. This is not the case with concrete thinking in which concepts are unified in the Concept, which is self-consciousness in action and, therefore, history. Undoubtedly, in this latter, philosophy, or what is taken for philosophy, is succeeded by forms of the spirit which may be valued as art or conduct or science and not as philosophy. Here, as we have noticed, spiritual life seems to turn in a perpetual circle, like a mad dog chasing its own tail. Such a spiritual circle is an absurdity because it finally lacks the logical necessity for returning to its starting point if the beginning is not identical with the end.

An abstract classification of the forms of the spirit is not possible unless we remain within the rigorous order of their purely formal character. And their abstract nature can in no way explain the historical development in which their real or apparent recurrence is to be verified. A given philosophy has a certain body of doctrine in virtue of which, for example, we distinguish the mechanical theory of Democritus from the idealism of Plato and oppose the Herbartian realism to the idealism of Hegel. And each of these philosophies is still in its own way a philosophy. The form is the same, though the subject matters are different. But it is obvious that, when we consider the form alone, as we must in definitions according to the logic of abstract thinking, there is no way of explaining the diverse subject matters and the history of the different philosophies within the unity of their development. This implies that any attempt to discover in the concept of philosophy as such the reason for the decline or supersession of a given philosophy makes no sense.

This is the reason that every philosophy, as it is actualized in the thought of the philosopher who professes it, is not *a* philosophy, but philosophy—the one philosophy which will never decline and which leads every philosopher at first (that is, before he passes from abstract thinking to concrete thinking) to assert dogmatically that his own philosophy is unsurpassable. And then some philosopher digs himself into this abstract moment of his thought and persists diabolically in the most obstinate dogmatism until he makes himself a laughing stock by defying the laws of thought. So much the worse for him: thought goes on its way.

By what principle must we abstractly classify the forms of the spirit? Evidently only by the rhythm of thought itself. And thought proceeds by a continuous and progressive reflection upon itself, for it realizes itself just so far as it becomes self-conscious. The rhythm of the spirit then can be defined as a continual reflection upon itself as its object of thought. The principle for mapping out the spiritual life, from whatever point of view this is attempted, can only be one which allows us to presuppose abstractly the object of thought to thought, the subject matter of the judgment to the form in which thought attains a definite character. First comes the object of the judgment and then the judgment. Thus, if there are forms or stages of the spiritual life which constitute the object of the judgment of another form or stage, this latter could not precede the former, but must succeed it as its fulfillment or conclusion.

When we speak of the life of the spirit, we distinguish in it (rightly or wrongly) art, religion, law, morality, science, philosophy. And whatever concept we may have of each of these activities or forms of activity of the spirit, we are all agreed that between philosophy and all the others there is a difference. And this difference may be defined by saying that philosophy contains the knowledge or consciousness or concept or judgment—or whatever we wish to call it—of all the others. Philosophy judges all the others, but none of them judges philosophy. It does not matter that some artist or moralist or jurist should in his turn reflect on philosophy and have his say, for in this case it is not the art of the artist that is operative, but his philosophy; and the same is true of the jurist or the moralist. For to judge philosophy is always to philosophize. And although the artist seems to find in his own immediate esthetic experience rather than in critical and speculative reflection the proof of the inadequacy of the philosophical system, here again the artist is not an artist, but a philosopher. For he is not solving an artistic problem, but a problem about art, though his arguments are drawn from his artistic experience. The same can be said of the jurist or the moralist within their respective domains. As soon as experience begins to afford reasons for criticizing a philosophy, it is no longer concrete spiritual life, but has already become, by that very fact, the object of a different spiritual life, as happens when one passes from art to philosophy. Someone who criticized, by walking, the philosophical negation of motion must have very well presumed that he had a valid argument, for not only was he walking, but he was tacitly using his physical movement as an affirmative argument against the negative, not in space but in thought where the negation took place.

Everything, then, is judged by philosophy; and nothing, except philosophy, can judge philosophy. This is a unique characteristic which, however it may be understood, indeed serves to prove that philosophy is the final and absolute form of the life of the spirit. This conception has sometimes, as in the first lines of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, taken on a mythical sense which would assign to philosophy a sort of eschatological function to be completed when the life of the spirit has all been utilized and the world has come to the end of its day. But if we reduce this myth to the logical form of abstract thinking, it has its undeniable truth, provided that such a truth is not transferred or extended from abstract thinking, which is its abode, to the concrete and actual world. For there, as we said at the beginning of this section, philosophy was born with man, and it is found at the end because it was there from the beginning.

6. *The Spirit as Concrete Thought and the Body*

Let us see how all this can be. Thought exists as thinking and not as that abstraction which is commonly referred to when we speak of man's thoughts. In fact, there are in this case essential and vital thoughts, thoughts of the greatest importance, which are identified with the personality of the man who would rather give up his life than renounce them; and there are futile, accidental thoughts, which come and go while the man remains the same. But both kinds are thoughts which presuppose the thinking being who himself is simply thought—the thought of which we are now speaking. This is nothing abstract or purely ideal to be considered in itself, but it is the very reality, the most concrete we can think of, the essence of any form of concreteness.

This being, which *is* because it thinks and insofar as it thinks, is the first existence of which we can speak (for one cannot conceive of anything else existing except in relation to it). It is superfluous to say that it is the only existence we know directly: we know it inwardly.[4] But by *inwardly* we do not mean to point to a specific part of space outside of which there would be another part: rather we refer to a mode of observing our being. And when we adopt this mode, the relation of the inward to the outward is reversed, since the outward suddenly is seen as within what appeared inward.

In fact the turning inward of our reflection, needed to direct our attention to our thought, has a merely negative meaning. The inward is nothing but the negation of the outward; but it is not the negation of the specific difference by which, for instance, the space outside a circle is distinguished from the space inside it; rather it is the negation also of the proximate genus within a given space which may indifferently be called inside or outside, depending on whether the observer places himself inside or outside the circumference. Since in space all things are mutually external, everything can be reduced to a sum of parts or points alongside one another; there is nothing but the multiplicity of elements, every one of which is outside all the others. The externality, which is negated when we pass from nature to spirit or thought, is not a relative but an absolute externality; and that which negates it is not a relative but an absolute inwardness.

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[4] Here lies the truth that gave birth to contemporary existentialism—a truth which existentialism subsequently lost.

Within this absolute inwardness, which is characteristic of thought and which we all know by simple and direct experience, everything becomes internal, that is to say everything which, from a spatial point of view, seemed outside us, intrinsically external by the multiplicity of its elements alongside one another. Even space reveals itself as the form of a certain level of experience. This form is proper to the spirit and intrinsic in it: hence the possibility of representing in consciousness (where else, I wonder, could they be represented?) not only our bodies and all their organs, but everything that surrounds our bodies, from the nearest to the most remote, everything in heaven or in earth, real or imaginary.

Everything is inward, where the foundation of everything lies. If that foundation is denied, all will inevitably collapse. Thought is, then, not only the source of all our ideas and dreams, our resolutions and impulses, in short, of our intellectual and moral life, but of our life itself. This existence, which we have pointed out as the basis of all existence, is not the thinking being enclosed in the charmed circle of pure thought, but existence in the complexity and variety of all its aspects. It is man, for man is, at least virtually, more than man and, therefore, destined to rise above himself. But man knows, by his constant and unfailing experience, that he is not pure thought, disembodied spirit, not able, without the help of two arms and two legs, to approach and assist another spirit. Man is a spirit, but he is also a body. All his life unfolds in a constant interrelation and cooperation of the psychical and physical elements of his being. And when man lifts his head and, conscious of his infinite worth, pronounces *I Am* (and he cannot say this unless he thinks), this *I* is a unity of self-consciousness and not abstract consciousness of some immaterial principle which popular metaphysics would identify with the soul; it is a full and perfect consciousness of his concrete reality. What do we find within it, when we look attentively? Spinoza answers: the *objectum mentis*, the body. What does Rosmini find as the essential object of that *fundamental feeling* which is for him the primary act that constitutes the soul? The body. Every man's body, before being constructed in detail by repeated experiences and anatomical and physiological laws—at the starting point of its construction, when we first become aware of the body—is nothing but the mere object of self-consciousness in its immediate opposition to the subject. It is an object in itself mysterious and intangible; but it reveals its essence and enters into the world of things most familiar to us, because it cooperates with the subject in that rhythm of self-consciousness which is thought.

Thus we feel our body and all its modifications. Our body is a sensation, the very sensation which is the basis of all others; the modifications of our body are but sensations, internal sensations, for they exist in consciousness and gain actual existence in the process of development of thought. Sensations are internal, but productive of reality through their participation in the total dynamism of thought: they are not passive but active, creative, volitional. And being sensations of our body, their energy reveals itself as productive of physical effects. Hence the soul incessantly creates its body, and embodies itself in it—the whole in the whole. So the soul speaks, that is, thinks and wills by means of the body. It smiles through the face: its pulses beat with full vigor in every limb; for through these limbs its life grows and enriches itself and acts in the so-called external world which it invades and annexes.

My body then is a sort of outline sketch—standing out against a far vaster background—of that Body which is nature itself or the bodily world. This implies that I can, to a certain extent, become aware of the embodiment of my soul, by confining myself provisionally to the consideration of my own body as restricted within certain limits of space and time. But as I proceed in the understanding of this embodiment I am forced to push back the boundaries of my body both in space and time, until they encompass the whole Universe. Limit after limit must be broken down in order to make our bodily world adequate to the infinity of the spirit. And when the last barrier has been laid down, this physical Universe, in its temporal and spatial infinity, will be stripped of those properties which in the beginning seemed most opposed to our spirit, and it will reveal itself in its true nature, as opposed to the spirit but not external to it: within, and essential to, that rhythm which constitutes the creative act of the spirit—self-consciousness. But, by its very infinity and eternity, this physical world will keep the thinker mindful that he must take account of the infinity of thought and of the necessity for him to liberate his real and living soul from the shackles of the finite.

7. *The Infinity of the Spirit*

Only those who had achieved this point of view can conceive of freedom, which must necessarily be attributed to the spirit, as anything but a paradox: for freedom implies infinity. Our conception of the spirit as something limited by coexisting realities, material and even spiritual, does not allow us to minimize its participation in this divine prerogative of the Creator. Leibniz's finite monad is finite because it coexists with other finite monads in a relation which is not due to it but to the infinite monad. And if the existence of the infinite monad explains the compossibility of the many finite monads, it is impossible to understand the freedom of each, since each is founded and therefore determined by the pre-established harmony.

It is true that man's life (which is his thought) at every step runs against barriers that belie the infinity of the spirit and humble the human pride which presumes to be free and master of itself. But it is also true that the whole of life is to be understood as the constant effort to overcome these barriers and to realize its freedom in the infinity of its own being. So we may say that this marvelous energy, which is the source of our life, is indeed finite, but different from other finite things, which are destined to remain so. It is aware of its limits and sets itself to overcome them. This is the plain proof that it is not infinite, but is to be infinite; it is not born infinite, but achieves infinity. And since this energy which we call soul has the peculiarity of not being anything immediately, but of making itself all that it is to be, it is neither infinite nor finite, for its finiteness follows from its dialectical process of negation, in virtue of which it realizes itself by denying and overcoming itself. We may say that it realizes itself just so far as it *infinitizes* itself, if we are allowed to use a barbarous word for the sake of clarity. The act by which thought actualizes itself consists always in a suppression of limits and in becoming infinite. This acquisition of infinity is not something accidental or inessential to thought, for thought, as we have seen, cannot help thinking, and in thinking cannot help being free and, thus, infinite. This infinity is the innermost nature of thought; for thought is always absolutely free; but only insofar as it can be or become free through its own energies, that is, by continually exercising the very activity which brings it to its full development.

We see empirically that the spirit, which is this infinity and energy, actualizes itself in satisfying its needs, in solving its problems, and in battling with nature or the men who would seek to impose limits on it, in order to free itself and to affirm its own unlimited power. The individual fails, but the spirit, which is his essence and in whose realization his whole life consists, never surrenders: it rises again and carries on the fight tenaciously, irrepressively, until it achieves the victory and triumph which are the proof of its own infinity. Man hungers, thirsts, and is aware of what his being lacks. This is not physical need: rather it is the perception of this need, which raises a problem that man will struggle to solve by his intelligence, for he is only a thinking activity. He will discover the source of his need and thus he will pass from the obscurity of his nature within to the enlightened sphere in which his corporeal personality is fulfilled and his power enhanced and enriched by extending their boundaries. He will hunt the wild beasts and capture them. If he succeeds in keeping them alive, he will rear them and become their shepherd. He will gather herbs and fruits and, attaching himself to the soil bearing them, will become a farmer. Thus he will appropriate also the earth into his own personality, which grows in size and in power just as his body has grown at the bosom of mother earth, making her a means to the satisfaction of his increasing needs. And as experience unfolds his infinite potentiality which is dormant in the embryo of the spirit, his possessions will grow in complexity. First he will have his cave with his woman in it, then his children and other men conquered in fights over prey and subdued and enslaved; soon he will have weapons and booty. Man constantly extends his dominion; and if to be aware of him one has previously to see his face or hear his cry or feel the grip of his hand, now his presence is attested to by his woman who is part of him and whom he will defend as though she were his own flesh, by his children, his servants, his cattle, his threshold, the field he has begun to fence and on which he has impressed the mark of his will.

Where does man pause and come to a halt? Where does he recognize impassable boundaries? Only where he is somehow induced, by observation, experimentation, and, in short, thought, to recognize of necessity that beyond this point he would lose rather than gain, that his power would not be enhanced but limited, and that, in a word, he would find death and not life. The limits are not and cannot be imposed on him; they are discovered and acknowledged by him; they are laid down and accepted by him. The *law* to which he submits is not the suppression of his personality and will, but rather their elevation to a higher level, in relation to which his previous personality and will appear as particular, arbitrary and therefore false, deceptive, and essentially impotent. The acknowledgement of the limit is a new and more splendid proof of the infinity of the spirit.

Even on a most cursory survey of human history, one cannot help being immediately struck by this splendid truth which has inspired men with faith in the progress of civilization. From the first light of dawn, so far back as history can penetrate by conjecture or speculative inference, down to our own times, where the observer takes his stand and spreads the light of his thought over the course of human vicissitudes, throughout the whole painful but glorious ascent of centuries, there is a continual enhancement, not only of light and knowledge, but of the creative energy of the spirit which gradually enlightens the dense and dark material world, working through it in every direction; which searches into it and transforms it in order to possess it, or in a word, to spiritualize it. And so, if the observer strains his eyes into the remote future to which all our journey seems to be tending, he cannot help seeing far off a great shining light: the kingdom of the spirit.

All this can be said empirically, when we confine ourselves to observing merely the surface, though even there the inward truth shines through. But in order to grasp the principle and source of all existence, we must penetrate beneath the surface. Thought realizes its freedom or infinity by realizing itself, by thinking. Thinking is the secret of every victory and of every conquest. Thinking is the labor which man endures all his life in order to win his daily bread and whatever is necessary for his livelihood. And the sweat of his brow is the sign of his labor. It is no mere physical labor; for the body would not move, nor develop and adapt itself to particular movements, without a purpose and a consciousness of what is necessary to attain that purpose. The body, like everything else that is physical, seems, abstractly considered, a mere instrument or appendage for the purposes of the soul, whereas in the concrete it is the soul itself in the indivisible complex of its organic being. The labor we think of is a labor of thought. The peasant thinks in digging the hard soil, no less than the astronomer who searches out the heavens and marks the courses of the stars. The infant thinks, however obscurely, in seeking his mother's breast; and so does the philosopher (and how obscurely, too!) who searches into the sources of universal life. The problems are always the same whether they be called theoretical or practical. It is always a thought struggling to form itself; it may take the form of what is called an *action* (perhaps a stroke of the pick in the clay, perhaps an affectionate word to one who needs it); or it may take the form of what is called a word (perhaps spoken to another, perhaps silently to oneself in one's innermost heart). To give some such form to thought, so that the thought which was not yet may come into being, is always to solve a problem: it is to think.

Thinking then is the universal need of man, the common denominator, as it were, of all his needs. And at the same time thinking is the satisfaction of all his needs. Faith in life is faith in thought, in the possibility of it as free, infinite thought. It is by this faith, in fact, that man lives. Those who lose this faith commit suicide, for they have persuaded themselves that the problem is insoluble, that thinking is impossible, that truth is beyond our reach; and they have come to the conclusion that our cravings, especially those which no renunciation can possibly eradicate from our heart, can never be satisfied. Some forms of skepticism, in order to prevent man from drowning in the infinite desperation of nihilism, stop short of extreme negation and make a distinction between thought or reason and life or instinct. They hold that problems which cannot be solved by thought may be adequately, and indeed they are, solved by life. But these halfway skepticisms, when they succeed in restoring to man's mind the faith in a mysterious and providential life, do not commit the solution of the problem of life to any other power than the very thought they have declared impotent. For any other power, on which man relies, is always acknowledged, that is, recognized by thought. It has no validity but what thought itself confers on it. If a man has recourse to drugs to solve some problem of his bodily functioning, he does not thereby abandon his natural liberty, he rather employs it to select and use the expedient to which he resorts. The medicine represents not the renunciation, but the use of his liberty. This is an answer to those who would cite religious faith as belying the doctrine just set forth, that the infinity of thought is necessarily implied by the faith in life.

Nor is there anything inconsistent with this doctrine in the natural tendency of men to compromise and to adapt themselves to a life which contradicts the ideals of their thought. We must consider in each concrete instance what the thought really is by which a man lives, the thought which is his very life, the actual existence or development of his innermost and unalterable personality. For though we know that we are always, or almost always, ready to compromise, it is only on what is not essential to us, to our existence as it is actualized in our concrete daily life. We must not judge from outside what is and what is not essential to our being, for if we do we shall be unable to retain a firm grasp of the truth here maintained, that no man can live within limits externally imposed, which violate the potential infinity of his spiritual nature. The impossible thing is that I forego a certain word or action which, at a given moment, I consider to be essential, or in general the unique solution possible for my immediate, inevitable problem. So true it is that one man meets death willingly for trifling motives, which others can only understand by supposing some pathological condition, and another goes the most shameful lengths to escape the peril of death, which the moral law bids him to confront.

Philosophy, in its religious solemnity, is the life of the spirit realizing, practically as well as theoretically, its own infinity through working, struggling, and in general through thinking. *Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*[a] might be the maxim of the old philosophy which was held to dwell in the uppermost story of the garret. We can only say: *Primum vivere, id est philosophari* (*sive cogitare*).[b] And we say *Primum*, not because there is anything else to do afterwards, but because, whenever we penetrate into the innermost and see what is at the beginning of all beginnings, we find that it is thought and that thought is philosophy. At times the problem is about a trickle of water which might quench my burning thirst, and which is my universe so long as my thirst is all I can think of; at other times it is about what, after long thought and critical analysis, I call the universe or the Absolute. At one moment to live is to reach that water and so quench my thirst; at another it is to reach the firm conviction that the universe is no mechanical play of material things that would annihilate thought by making freedom impossible, but the free and spiritual reality which lives in thought itself.

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[a] First live, then philosophize.

[b] First live, and that is to philosophize or think.

8. *The Infinite Process of the Infinity of the Spirit*

To break down all boundaries, to become infinite: that is, as we have seen, the solution of the problem; that is thought. But whence come the boundaries and whence the problem? The boundary is not something which thought meets with. How could it, unless it were thinking, and how could it think unless it were free, and so, infinite?

When we look at the matter empirically, it definitely seems as if thought encountered the boundary in the course of its own development. The child thinks he knows everything and can do everything (and man begins like a child in every new experience). You can tell it by the confident tone of his assertions and the boldness of his demands. If you listen to him, he is always in the right; give him his way, and all would have to bow down before his wishes. He must be disillusioned and instructed by experience. Without the lessons of experience, even in the guise of warnings or prohibitions by those who have charge of his education, he would live happily in the boundless extent of his kingdom.

But such an empirical view is founded on shaky ground. It is founded on the supposition that the child's personality is enclosed within those narrow limits, outside of which lie all the sources of experience that can make him aware of the error of his claims to infinity. But it is obvious that if his or any personality could be enclosed in those narrow limits, as shown by an empirical observation, it would be absurd to speak of spiritual infinity or freedom. We come back to our old point: thought is not known from without but only from within. Thus, neither teacher nor other sources of truth are seen to be outside the personality of the child, for they speak to him in the same language which he hears within himself.

From this point of view, if there are limits, they can only be internal, laid down by thought itself, for thought not only lays down its own limits, which it cannot dispense with, but it cannot lay them down without overstepping them. So true is it that to state a problem is to solve it, and to state it clearly is to solve it clearly. What, in fact, is a limit if not what the spirit perceives as something other than itself and which it has to assimilate? It may be, for example, another's will, so long as it does not willy-nilly, coincide with our own. A limit is something other than ourselves which must be identified with ourselves. And what is thought, as we have come to understand it, if not the setting up of an object which is then identified with the subject to which it was opposed?

We must distinguish three stages or aspects of thought, not in a historical but a logical sequence. The last stage is the synthetic unity of the other two, and is precisely thought. The first is self-consciousness, the second is consciousness of something, the third is self-conscious consciousness of something. They may also be called subject, object, and unity of subject-object. The object presupposes the subject whose object it is and by which it is in fact created; for the subject makes itself a subject so far as it has consciousness of itself, and in the self thus reduplicated it distinguishes a self which is the subject and a self which is the object of consciousness. And in order to distinguish them effectively, it sets them as opposites, refusing to recognize itself in the self, and taking the object, not for the mirror of the self, but for something other than the self, which limits it. But if the opposition were not resolved in the unity of a synthesis embracing the opposites, there would not even be an opposition. The two terms would remain one, for, being unrelated, there would be no means of passing from one to the other and so getting two in place of one.[5] Duality demands unity and opposition already points to identity. And the relation which indicates the fundamental unity resides in the very reason of the duality. For the duality arises by the opposition of the object to the subject in the very process through which self-consciousness is attained. Self-consciousness does not occur in the immediacy of the subject, which is the starting point for the formation of reality but not yet actual reality. In actual reality the subject is related to the object, as one term correlative with its opposite, and identified with it in the relation in which alone it is real. Thus, through its consciousness of the object, the subject realizes the consciousness of itself, without which it is nothing. The more it objectifies itself, the more it develops as a subject; the more man's knowledge grows, the more his sphere of action widens and the wider grow his possibilities, provided that he does not spread himself over unrelated masses of knowledge or in a number of incoherent activities, but continually returns from things to himself and uses every means to reinforce the unity of his principles and of his character.

Self-objectification is the middle term in the dialectical process by which the subject realizes itself as self-consciousness; self-limitation is the only way of becoming infinite. This is so, not because infinity arises from limitation, but because only through the limiting object can the true infinite, which alone is real, escape from the false infinity which we assume without ground. We call this false infinity because it does not yet correspond to the full and perfect essence of the spiritual act which alone is infinite.

Those who have not sufficiently reflected on the activity of thought might be led to believe that the analysis above outlined shows the necessity for a limit, but not for an absolute limit. They might think that, once the subject has surmounted the limit which it sets up in order to realize itself as self-consciousness, we have the infinite without possibility of further self-limitation or progress to further infinity. However, their view would not go beyond appearances and would fail to see the absurd consequences that the act of thinking would then have become identified with a fact, and that the spirit would consequently have been outside itself and fixed in a material existence. But this is impossible, for the act of self-consciousness consists precisely in the dematerialization of everything material which opposes itself to the pure subject: in the dissolution of the fact which is thus assimilated in the circle of the act, in the absorption of the fact of objectivity which has opposed itself to the immediate activity of the subject. This act of self-consciousness, from which are derived the spatial and temporal orders, is itself prior to space and time and multiplicity: it is the eternal act![6] This means that in the empirical multiplicity of spiritual acts, which appear successive, there is, in reality, the manifestation of one single act which is itself infinite: one might call it thought infinitely making itself infinite. Thought, speaking nonempirically, is always active, finding a new problem in every solution. In fact, all that at any moment might be said to be achieved is nothing when compared with what has to be done in the life of the spirit. Whenever we can say that the spirit has overcome its limits and so made itself infinite, we have to add that it must again set up a limit to overcome, since the infinite is not infinite, but is constantly making itself, and thus becoming, so. A development which reached perfection would change its essential nature of development, and would be degraded into that static existence where there is no logical place for the spirit.

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[5] Cf. the criticism of atomism in *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* (Florence: Sansoni, 1938).

The eternity of the spirit, freed from the limitation of empirical things which universally presuppose it, is the eternity of its development, that is, of the inseparable interplay of its being with its non-being. This implies the eternity of a limit (which is the non-being of its being) and the eternity of the synthesis of this being with this non-being, and the eternal overcoming of its limit, the solution of its problem, self-consciousness, thought.

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[6] Cf. *Teoria dello spirito come atto puro*, chap. IX, § 11.

A spirit which does not solve its problem is a spirit ceasing to be: it is death. But death would be the condition of a spirit so lifeless as to set itself no problem.

FIRST PART

THE CONCRETENESS OF ART

I

The Existence of Art

1. *Existence and Thought*

The starting point of thought, and therefore of every problem of inquiry, is existence. We may say in general that this is evident from the fact that every thought refers to something whose existence is its very object. Even if this existence seems to be a mere idea or dream or mental delusion, still the inquiry is justified because the mind which entertains the idea exists. Even when we deal (to use an old distinction) not with definite beings or their accidental qualities but with abstract general concepts having no reality (though they are said to be mere subjective accidents with no truth or value) the inquiry into them is always justified, for it refers the general concept to the individuals comprised under it and whose existence gives thought a reason either for forming such concepts or for constructing some theory about their nature. According to different philosophical doctrines, what exists may be either a particular or a universal. Plato's Idea is the true existent, and all thought, to be true thought, must be concerned with such an existent. Whenever thought, in the effort to think, suspects or ascertains that what it wants to understand does not exist, the inquiry is abandoned. Further pursuit of it would sooner or later be found to be absurd. An inquiry may be directed to the unknown, which one hopes to know. But the first condition for inquiry is that the unknown be conceived as existing.

There is a conclusive reason for this, which is attested to by experience: the reason is that thought cannot have any object but itself. Whether or not through thought (including under that general name both images and concepts) we catch a glimpse of things beyond our thought, the fact is that if we did not think of them, if they were not in our mind as thoughts, it would be absolutely impossible to talk of them. Thought, as we have seen, is self-consciousness, the life and development of the Ego; it is thought always reflecting upon itself: *Nosce te ipsum.* Thought is the true and only foundation of itself. Not only does it exist, but, as we have observed, nothing else exists outside of it. It is the existence *par excellence*, within which, we may say, exist all things that have existence. Not only does it exist, but, unlike all other things which can be distinguished from it and yet be said to exist, it exists of necessity. It is its own reason for existing. It exists because it affirms itself and its very nature is affirmation. Even if it denied itself, it would be existing and therefore affirming itself. Since thought can think nothing which is not in itself and a form of itself, that is, existing in itself and a form of its own existence, it is impossible that thought should not have existence.

2. *Art as an Existing Thing*

Since our thought is concerned with art, we must presuppose that art is something which exists. And, to begin with, we take it to be what common sense understands by it. The word "art" suggests to common sense, for example, the *Divine Comedy* or the *Canzoniere*,[a] the *Transfiguration*[b] or the *Last Judgment*,[c] *Hamlet* or the *Betrothed*,[d] but not Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or his *Poetics*, nor the *De docta ignorantia*[e] nor the *Discours de la méthode* nor the *Ethics* nor the *Scienza nuova*[f] nor the *Critique of Pure Reason.* Everyone agrees that a work of imagination is one thing and a work of thought another. So each, either by following familiar paths or groping and fumbling in the darkness,

[a] By Petrarch.
[b] Painting by Raphael.
[c] Painting by Michelangelo.
[d] By Manzoni.
[e] By Nicholaus de Cusa.
[f] By Giambattista Vico.

knows more or less where to lay his hands whenever he wants to collect works of art or to read the poets of a given nation or century, or to write the history of art or of some particular art covering the world in general or only some definite race or period.

It is obvious, however, that the concept which guides such inquiries is in one sense a concept by which we might claim to know the essence of art, but in another it is not. It is a concept which will serve to guide our steps if we want to visit the Uffizi Gallery; but it will no longer serve as a concept to distinguish what is art from what is not, once we have crossed the threshold and begun to walk through the rooms and to see and criticize the pictures. The beginner may certainly get some guidance from tradition, reputation, or the judgments of others, which he accepts from a vague idea that they have been made by experts, though he is still unable to ascertain their origin or grounds. But obviously all this can only afford very imperfect criteria of judgment, which, as he goes on, he will have to revise, check, correct, integrate, and, in a word, develop. The concept we finally employ in the presence of a work of art, when we see and judge its beauty, is no longer the crude concept which guided the first steps of our inquiry. What we can properly say exists is evidently not what we thought at the beginning, but what we think at the end. We do not know what it is that exists as art when we see it hazily from afar; we only know it when we see it closely in the full light of day.

We may of course say that anyone who wants to know Italian poetry must study it within the framework of its history. However, this history only gives us abstract signs and labels of contents from which to start, but we cannot be satisfied until we have come into contact with the actual poetry which the Italians have produced. So long as we describe the characteristics of "new style," give the general picture of renaissance poetry, discuss the seventeenth century, the baroque, and so on, we shall not have met a poet face to face or heart to heart, we shall not have known any poetry and shall not be in a position to say:

here is art. We may describe the whole world, art included, without ever really knowing whether there is such a thing as art, of which we spoke as a constitutive element of our universe. We may suppose that there is, or convince ourselves that there must be; but we have not reached the point of being able to declare that, in fact, there *is*. And since the problem of its essence is closely bound to that of its existence we shall not be in a position to say what sort of thing this art is, which we suppose to exist. We shall be building in the air upon which philosophers have often been content to erect their esthetics.

History, in order to penetrate into the richness and solidity of existence, must be something more than a web of concepts or a network of general ideas; it must not portray things from afar; it must come to grips with the concrete, the individual, the fact, certainty—the existent. There is no poetry outside the poet. This does not mean that the nominalists are completely right, for there is also the universal. In fact, when we come to think of it, there is nothing else. But a universal which is not merely *flatus vocis* has its concrete existence in the particular. And poets would be nothing if they were not all of them poetry, the real substance of their worth and immortality.

What exists then is the poet. But the poet is not this given citizen, identified by so-called *general marks*, and therefore dissolved into generalizations and even more nonexistent than abstract poetry. We must notice, in fact, that the characteristics given in biography, like those of the bureau of vital statistics, are nothing more or less than generalizations. They can be accumulated to infinity without giving us the living man who must have been the poet, existing in the existing world. Biography in the hands of the pedant may give us only a puppet, accurately constructed and put together, but lifeless. And this puppet cannot have been the poet. On the contrary, biography, in the hands of an artist, can give us the portrait of a man, lifelike but not true, a work of imagination whose original may have existed, though there is no evidence of it. To get in touch with the existent we must not lose sight of the document, but of the document interpreted and transferred from its materiality into the logic of spiritual life, and considered and respected, within it, as a limit. For the existent who was the poet, the only firsthand, authentic document, is in his poetry. Outside his poetry the poet may have lived a full life in his family, in society, in his passions, in his toil as a thinker, and we will not say that all this life was irrelevant to his poetry; but, taken in itself, outside his poetry, his life surely is not poetry and there is no contradiction in supposing that it might result in no poetical work. We must turn to the poetical work and fix our attention on it if we want to know the poet as a poet.

And this is what every critic or historian does, if he is not a prattler and has the mind to speak from experience and in earnest about poetry, and a particular poem.

3. *The Difficulty of Grasping Art in Its Actual Existence*

But though many assert that they have present in their mind the individual work of art in itself, they are really thinking merely of an image associated with it, and of a quite different nature—a book, for instance, if a poem is in question; the canvas, if a painting; a cast, if a statue. There is, for instance, the *Divine Comedy*, which we can easily read and which is supposed to be the object of our knowledge. Alongside there is a row of books, and then a bookcase, and then a wall; and just outside the door is a cloister with columns, and inside the cloister a garden, and trees and flowers and black soil and so on.

These same people may have in mind that fluctuating memory which arises dimly in a man who is moved to take up again Dante's poem, read long ago; or they may have in their memories the lively pictures and floods of sentiment to which their hearts were moved by the reading of some episode; or perhaps they are thinking of the universal structure of the three Canticles together, peopled as they are with ghosts, tragedies, passions, reflections, and warnings; but all arranged in a kind of necessary foreshortening where the individual perspective and the subjective play of light and shade throw into relief what is essential, and leave scarcely visible in the background elements which, in an actual reading of the poem, might prove vitally essential. If we compare the object of these people's thought with that which might result from an intelligent and attentive reading of the poem, we shall certainly find between the one and the other as much difference as there is between a living man and a mere portrait or description of him. Portraits and descriptions either refer to the man himself (in his flesh and blood) or they serve no purpose. For the reality is not in words or portraits, but in the man they signify; for whom they may be symbols, but certainly not substitutes.

A poem has no equivalent but itself. The only way to get acquainted with it and to grasp its existence is to read it. This seems easy enough for those who have learned their alphabet and know the language, but, like so much else, it is easy only on the surface. People are quick to claim that they know a language. But language is like art; it does not hang in the air, in some heaven of universals, with all its words ready-made, each always meaning the same, regardless of who uses it. Words and language together exist only in the mouth of the speaker. It may be said in general to exist in the mouth of the people. But we know that a people all speaking at once does not make itself understood. In order for us to understand it, someone must speak for it. When we say a people, we must be understood to mean the average individuals, as well as particular speakers: writers who have spoken or who are living and speaking. It is obvious that a man only speaks when he is speaking, and not when he is sleeping or eating. So speech is on his lips only in the moment of speaking; and if we want to know its nature we must grasp it in those moments. It is not enough just to look to the individual in order to grasp his living word; we must listen to him when he is expressing his soul and his thought. And it is futile to expect a living speech from the people in general, for, apart from the individual, the people is an abstraction; nor yet from writers in general, for, as an average type, they are also an abstraction: nor even from a given writer taken over his whole life from birth to death. We can hear the living word only when the writer speaks in his works, which are always different, for the same word used by the same writer has different meanings not only in different writings, but even in different parts of the same work.

The task of learning and knowing a language is therefore difficult, long, and almost endless. A man would be sadly deceived if, for example, he should pick up the *Divine Comedy* in the belief that, as he knows the alphabet in which it is written and printed, he so knows its language. The alphabet is a tool which, when you learn to handle it, can be put to many uses. Not so with language, for language is not a tool which exists by itself and can be learned and used before and outside the books and the living speeches which it should help us to understand.

Dante's language is generically the Italian language, but specifically it is Dante's. And it develops in his works, varying and growing with the whole spirit which it expresses. Only in the *Comedy* can we find the language in which it was written. And those who want to acquire the very language of the poem before reading it, would remain eternally on the threshold without ever crossing it.

He who wants to know Dante's poetry and language must read the poem. He will read it and know it, that is, he will behold the poetry he was looking for and will understand the language in which it was expressed. But does he see and understand it at once from the very first page or verse or word? Evidently he does not. The motto which anyone reading a book should keep in mind and never forget in the course of his reading is: *respice finem.*[6] The meaning of each part is to be found in the whole, and until the whole is known it cannot be claimed that anything at all has been understood. And if every word is what it is in its precise context; if every stanza re-echoes the master tone of the whole poem; if the meaning of every word varies according to the intonation we give it (aloud or in our imagination): it follows that it is impossible to understand and, therefore, to read with the appropriate accent a single word until the whole poem has been read and understood. All this is very simple and obvious, although it is often unnoticed and only occasionally remembered. Perhaps it is never remembered in such a strict and absolute manner as to make us feel that in the hundred cantos of the poem, as well as in all the chapters of a novel, there is a unity, a single word.

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[6] Look to the end.

Some people count every syllable and understand nothing. The analysis without synthesis is the death of the spirit.[1] The word is something unique and, by its absolute unity, it is infinite. Nothing enters into it from the outside, for in its unity it has no relations except with itself. Dante must be explained through Dante, as Father Giuliani[h] used to say. Every word, whether spoken by Dante or uttered by a baby's lips, has its whole meaning in itself. It is so complete in itself that it cannot be continued in another word. So he who writes *end* at the bottom of his last page disengages himself from his poetical thought and goes on living. He cannot go on with his poem, for that was not interrupted but completed and self-contained like a living organism.

4. *The Subjective Nature of Art's Historical Existence*

The difficulties spring up on every side, they thicken, and multiply. If every word, every work of art in general is a "walled garden," without entrance or exit, how are we to enter it? How are we to reach that innermost source from which poetry and art flow? Are we to say that we are conscious of the work of art always as an innate intuition of our own spirit? This view encounters all the familiar difficulties which the history of philosophy has shown in the theory of innate ideas. It is not explained, for instance, why we sometimes have this intuition and sometimes not; why it is sometimes in our consciousness and sometimes outside it. And the very point which the hypothesis was invented to bring to light remains mysterious, for it is impossible to explain how what is supposed outside the mind (in whatever way we think of it) can get in. Being out of sight of our experience, it cannot be accounted for.

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[1] Cf. *Sistema di logica*, vol. I, pp. 187–188, 208 ff.

[h] Giambattista Giuliani (1818–1884), a Dante scholar and holder of the Dante chair in Florence. He invented the formula "Dante spiegato con Dante" (Dante explained through Dante), which meant that in order to explain the *Comedy* one must refer to the poet's other works.

To admit that the unity of the work of art already exists and that a break must be made in order to enter within its enclosing circle (a break which is then to be patched up) is something which can be fancied but not thought out. This is the abstractly realistic view of history, which may be called *historicism*. Such a view empirically presupposes that the subject matter of historiography is a reality already complete and perfect in itself and that the historical inquiry is carried out from the outside, through documents or tradition bridging the gap between the past, where that reality resides, and the present, in which the inquiry takes place. This theory is absurd for the same general reasons which prove the absurdity of all empiricism. If historical reality dwelt in the past and the living knowledge of it in a subsequent present, the spirit which creates this knowledge would be limited and conditioned; its freedom would be destroyed and knowledge rendered impossible.

Yet where are we to find the work of art if not in the past? The present is occupied with the search for it; and it could not be otherwise. Whenever anyone asks if such a thing as art exists, so that he may discover what it consists in, he will certainly not find it in the actual moment of his spiritual life which aims at the understanding of art, that is, at philosophy, rather than the artistic creation. Indeed, the future cannot afford what we are seeking, for the future is the realm of the non-existent. So the work of art, whose existence occasions the problem of art, can only fall within the past, even if it concerns itself with the work of art just completed.

It is in fact certain that, however great the interval of time between us who are reading and the poet who wrote the poem, this interval is knowable and measurable so long as we think of reading but are not yet reading the poem. While we read, the interval disappears; the past lives again and its life will not die; we are in that "air timelessly dusk,"[1] in which the poet marvelously imagines his Limbo, the abode of the souls who, having failed to act, never entered into that temporal course of human history, whence the being of time is built; a Limbo that is also the abode of the great spirits, the giants of thought, history, art, whose faces do not change through the ages. Anyone who has ever read with all his heart, as he must if he is to understand a writer, knows from experience that, while reading, every thought of times and matters foreign to the subject vanish. The reader forgets himself in the author's world, a world vibrating with passion if the author is a poet; and therein he loses distinction of things and people—whether the dearest or the most consistently feared and hated. Time passes without the reader's noticing it, because in that world, which is the world of the spirit, there is no time. In that world the dead live again and act and tell us their stories; and we never suspect (until we reflect upon completion or interruption of our reading) that all this belongs to past ages when these characters lived and died, and that they are no longer objects of our joy or pity, our sympathy or horror, for they have gone back into the eternal night of non-being which never aroused our emotions. Those days are gone, but the dead still live with us and speak to us, and we listen to them and hear their voices, which awaken in us the same passions that resound in them. If the work of art is not interrupted or hindered and is what it ought to be, the reader does not distinguish between himself and the writer. He is absorbed in the spectacle that unfolds before him. His personality, like that of a spectator in the theatre, is dead to everything but sympathy or hatred for the characters of the drama which develops before his eyes. The surrounding world of his daily life is forgotten, and with it the past years and the years to come; the spirit is poised in an eternally unchanging present.

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[1] "Aria senza tempo tinta," Dante, *Inferno*, III, v. 29.

In other words, if our reading puts us before a work of art in its actual existence, our end is attained when the work of art is reached; but by then the work of art has been removed from its historical setting. If instead of a literary work, we take a plastic or musical composition, *mutatis mutandis* the same thing will obviously happen. The work we know is not the one that stands there, separated from us, with a date of its own. It is the one which we seek far from ourselves and the actual experience of our life; but once found, it proves very near to us and in fact *our own*, a part of our experience. It is indeed often said that the life of a poem or of any work of art is born again in those who enter into relation with it; which implies that, before this rebirth, the poem is dead, and that its former life cannot be directly established but only inferred from this reincarnation —the sole experience we can possibly have of the poem itself.

5. *Prejudices against Subjectivism in History*

But this concept in its turn cannot be accepted without difficulties, of which the chief are the two following. The first is the extreme subjectivism which seems to derive from such a concept of the historical existence of the fact and which is not limited to the fact of art but is extended to every historical fact we aim at knowing. If the past can only be known as present; if someone else's work can only be learned and understood as our own insofar as we identify ourselves with the author or the actor; if the whole picture of past events in their chronological order can only be known on condition of being depicted in the very act by which they become the object of our consciousness; it follows that we can no longer claim to know what exists, but only to give existence to what we know. And there is no possibility of clearly distinguishing between what really happens and what our creative imagination plausibly reveals as having really happened. So our subjective whims insinuate themselves into the solid structure of the object and dissolve it in the flow of free creation.

In this section we shall limit ourselves to examining the charge of extreme subjectivism brought against our doctrine that the historical fact, in its existence, is immanent in the creative act of the thinking subject. Such immanence is for us incontestable from the moment we have agreed, as we have, that thought can think nothing but itself. But our theory can be subjected to censure only by those who claim—arbitrarily and absurdly—that the only way to understand objectivity is to presuppose the object of knowledge as something existing before the act by which we become aware of it. This presupposed existence is disproved by the development of historiography, especially by those historical writings devoted to a much-studied and famous subject matter such as the history of Rome. Here anyone can see, at a mere glance, that through the whole development of historiography, which aims at always approximating the fact as nearly as possible, the existent reality is being in various ways reshaped by thought. If we were, therefore, to discount the volumes of criticism from which historiography comes forth, the outlines of facts would vanish and their existence would gradually evaporate into an impenetrable mist where it would become indistinct and indistinguishable.

It is true that empirical methodology of history distinguishes between discovery and criticism, the former being devoted to the unearthing of original evidence and the latter to its interpretation; so the historian persuades himself that there is an objective starting point, one and the same, for all historians. But discounting the philological criticism to be conducted on the sources (which are thus transformed by a subjective study always personal, variable, and progressive), what matters most is that these very sources, through the interpretation and consequent reconstruction of which the subjectivity of the historian asserts itself, may or may not exist as such. Those which were once held authentic are proved apocryphal, or conversely; others, which were accepted as absolutely trustworthy, incur so many serious suspicions as only to be used henceforth with infinite precautions; and conversely those which were formerly suspected acquire great authority. In short, the distinction between sources and their use has only a relative validity which varies constantly with the development of historiography. Philosophically speaking, the historian's thought permeates absolutely the whole historical reality down to the crudest material with which he builds.

Though this distinction varies, it does not do so arbitrarily. If a chronicle, once supposed to be the naïve record of an eyewitness, is subsequently demonstrated to be a late forgery, the demonstration is based on proofs as compelling as any direct evidence of contemporary documents. It is one mind which appraises the document and weighs the proof to demonstrate that the chronicle is forged. When the sources change, the whole historical method and its results change, and this always for definite reasons which thought controls with constant accuracy, for in historical research thought strives to proceed with the utmost care. When thought has formulated these reasons, it finds itself face to face with them and bound to recognize them because it cannot overlook them. They constitute the solid structure of historical thought and generate in it that objectivity which is opposed to the arbitrary subjectivity of those who weakly affirm or deny for superficial reasons—reasons that can only satisfy John Doe because he enjoys a good digestion while having a bad palate. For here too there are those who reason soundly and those who reason at random and walk or fly according to their whims; but the error can be detected and eliminated only by that thought which *quandoque dormitat.*[j]

The objectivity of an historical fact is not denied by our conception of the fact as immanent in thought. Such objectivity has been transferred from that absurd external world where it is made to float by Spinoza's *fluctuatio imaginationis*[k] to the internal world where alone it is intelligible. For the past has no meaning in the temporal series if it is not related to the present; and that series can only be observed by reconstructing it and connecting it with the present of the thought which reconstructed it. In fact, if the various periods of time were emptied of the historical events with which thought fills them, time would no longer be distinguishable: a century would mean neither a hundred years nor a hundred seconds. The chain of facts and dates is forged and fastened by historical thought. But once fastened with those good reasons thought had for every link, it cannot be broken, at least until those reasons are refuted. And this chain is the bond of objectivity which the thought that recognizes it cannot but respect.

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[j] At some time or other is inactive.

[k] *Ethica*, II, xliv, Scholium.

6. *History, Art, Dream*

Before going on to our second difficulty[1] it may be useful to notice an essential difference between the historical fact, whose general nature was discussed in the last section, and the work of art, which is our more particular subject. This difference deserves the most careful exposition since, as we shall see later, it gives rise to most important consequences. The difference is that for any historical fact in the strict sense it is always possible to assign a perspective, giving it its chronological place, and the other determinations which, according to the kinds of facts, give each of them their individuality. But for works of art, as our analysis has shown, such a perspective is made impossible by the peculiar form in which they fuse and unify the subject knowing with the object known. And this peculiar form is a result of the essential nature of works of art.

We have seen that a poem is a single word; a whole, infinite and absolute. It is neither part of a larger whole, nor has it parts of its own. As a result, if we somehow succeed in entering into it, or so to speak, in *reading* it, we may indeed break off and go on to other poems or other thoughts, for in the depths of our heart we may still know that other interests are active besides those which motivated us to read the poem. But this breaking off can never be a transition, like that from one canto to another of the same poem, or from one chapter to another of the same treatise, or, of course, from one treatise to another on the same subject. There is nothing similar to the *Divine Comedy* outside the *Divine Comedy*. In leaving it we must change not only the subject matter but the method, not only our job but our trade.

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[1] See beginning of the preceding section.

Here we begin to notice a remarkable resemblance of art, which is a controlled and a clear-sighted activity of the spirit, to dreaming, which is the unbridled, free play of sleeping thought. Art, it is well known, has often been compared to dreaming; not, as has been asserted by recent writers, because in both of these activities the spirit rests absorbed in pure contemplation without deciding or even asking whether the world it contemplates is real, but simply because there is no continuity between dreaming and waking experience. Otherwise the two experiences are identical, for the same activity of assertion is found in our judgments during the alleged esthetic contemplation of a dream as in those from which we construct the reality that makes up our experience. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, if in the end the so-called contemplation can be nothing but thinking, and if thinking is always conscious thinking and must be considered as real? Moreover, the differences which a purely psychological, that is, empirical, point of view commonly notes between the two states are illusory. They arise from a method of observation which contradicts the fundamental principle of actual idealism,[m] which is the only possible way to penetrate into the life of the spirit and to know it. Actual idealism warns us that any moment of spiritual life, when looked at from outside, is materialized and so eludes any possibility of being known in its true spiritual nature. A feeling cannot be known by one who does not feel it because he cannot or will not; a thought cannot be known by one who does not think it, and to think it he must in some measure perceive its foundation of truth; a work of art cannot be known by a mathematician who is not capable of stopping his calculations for a single moment. If when we are awake we compare dreaming with waking, many characteristics of the latter will naturally be missing in the former, and among others that of reality, or, better, the existence of the object, since for the man who is awake the dreamworld is simply an illusion. Yet the unsleeping cannot but notice that the dreamer is unaware of his delusion; had he not been, he plainly could not be affected by those feelings of pleasure and pain which accompany the development of a dreamed event. Someone nevertheless goes on fabricating this groundless theory of a contemplation or intuition in which the spirit is satisfied with gazing, without asking whether what it sees is real or not.

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[m] The principle according to which reality is to be found only in the act of thinking.

But neither these dream illusions nor the more rare (but not too rare!) illusions of waking life are known to be illusions by those who are still under them. While they last, the experience does not lack the judgments which discriminate between reality and unreality; rather it is made up of these, and realizes itself as a perception of the most solid existence. It does not matter that it will later turn out to be a delusion, for this is not foreseen; if it were, the mere anticipation of it, however distant, would be enough to dispel the illusion.

A dream, then, is no dream for the dreamer, but a waking reality. It is this which gives a meaning to Hamlet's torturing doubt which all thinking beings can share; for they are faced sooner or later by the tragic question as to whether the whole of life, as we know it most vividly, might not be the stuff that dreams are made of. Such doubt would be absurd if in the very experience of dreaming we could observe the difference between it and that of waking, and could, while in the dream, distinguish the two experiences and so know that we are dreaming. We would be like a man who is poor but knows only too well, in general, the difference between wealth and poverty and would promptly be disillusioned if for a moment he fancied himself a Croesus. In dreaming there is absolutely no consciousness that the experience differs from waking; for the dreaming thought knows no other form of experience than that in which it is realizing itself. Not that the waking experience is forgotten. But (we have here another striking analogy between esthetic experience and the dream) the waking experience is taken up into the dream and transformed, as if it had never belonged to a different world from that in which the dreamer moves. There are no longer persons, things, and events of the real world which can still be distinguished from the mere dream, but all are strung on the same thread with the persons, things, and events of the dream. And all is a dream and nothing but a dream; a dream with no frontiers, or at least none that can possibly be crossed. And in this dream thought, as a waking man judges it, is imprisoned, though, from the point of view of the dream, it expatiates with infinite liberty.

The analogies here indicated between art and dreaming may give us hints worth taking for our inquiry, but they could not help us find our way nor could they be useful to our progress, if we did not begin by making plain, so far as dreaming is concerned, its proper place in the system of experience or life of the spirit.

7. *Dreaming and Waking*

Kant was aware of the substantial identity of dreaming and waking so far as each experience is considered in itself and not contrasted with the other. Nevertheless he set himself the problem of their difference, a problem which becomes the more pressing as their identity is more steadily recognized. The answer he gave was that the difference arose not from the elements of either experience taken one by one, but from the framework of our whole experience. Within this framework all the elements of our real experience have a place (a place that cannot be denied them without breaking the whole thread of that experience) where none of the elements of dream experience appear.

This solution is substantially correct and its truth cannot be contested when we have studied further the concept of experience. The fact is that when awake we judge our dreams, but the reverse never happens. Our dreaming thought does not contain our waking thought; if it did, it would have gone beyond our waking thought and seen its limits. This is what happens whenever thought discards an idea (whether concept, opinion, creed, or system) which it formerly entertained and which it later judges inadequate to its logical demands. But what dreaming cannot do is exactly what waking thought does. The former cannot arise above the latter and reject it as a dream and so establish itself in its own world as being the only real world. But waking thought judges dreams and so rises above them and eliminates them from the history of its development; just as a mathematician who, having discovered that he has made a mistake in an operation, erases the operation and considers it as not having been performed.

Dreams are no part of the texture of our experience because experience is not a mere heap of materials thrown together in some kind of receptacle, but a construction; and what constructs it is thought. And thought, at every stage of its construction, has its reasons for doing only what it does. If one thing enters into the pattern of our experience and another does not, that is because thought chooses it. And this choice is the result of the criticism to which thought submits all the materials that present themselves for comparison, materials which are in fact not mere materials but stages of thought itself. Thought subjects itself to self-criticism because by its very nature it can only be what it is on condition that it reflects and becomes conscious of itself, which means applying to itself the complex judgment that affirms by denying and denies by affirming. And all this implies choice and evaluation.

There is no doubt that, until thought has constructed an experience and has constituted itself as a definite thought, that is, that individual frame of mind which is peculiar to each man by having lived a particular life as an empirical ego, the boundaries between the world of pure imagination or dreams and the world of real perception fluctuate, so that the two worlds may be mistakenly taken as one undifferentiated world. The child finds it hard to distinguish the living persons from those of the fairy tales which have made his heart beat with joy or fear, love or horror. His imagination, not yet educated by experience, makes him really live in the world of his dreams. Material things receive from him the soul they do not have, and take on names and characters and adventures, so that he can talk with them and make friends or enemies of them according to the feelings that he, as an artist and creator of an imaginary world, lends them.[2] And the same thing happens at every age in dreams. When we listen to imaginary stories that children tell, we are sometimes seized with an uncomfortable suspicion that they are trying to deceive us and to convince us by skillful acting that these events, in which they picture themselves playing the leading parts, were real. And yet, we know, the child *fingit creditque*.[a] He believes his own inventions and dreams with his eyes open.

But his power of discrimination develops and imposes itself over his dreams as thought forms itself; for experience is, as it were, the form or body of thought—a form or body on which it constantly returns, mirroring itself in self-consciousness. But self-consciousness is not consciousness of an empty thought; it finds within thought the body of the thinking man and the whole world with which his body forms a system. Yet this system or framework of experience is nothing other than thought, becoming gradually more efficient and therefore more resistent to the intrusion of unreal elements, though itself remaining the source and touchstone of all reality.

The popular belief is the opposite of this, that the touchstone is outside us, in things. But the fact is that, on waking up, we cannot dispel the mist of dreams and get our bearings among the things around us unless we recognize these things as already known and therefore connected with the ego which, on waking up, awakes also the world around it, which is the new world within it. The fables which tell of a man waking in an utterly new and strange world always show how impossible it is for him to shake off the dream phantasy. They represent him as moving in a reality which is neither that of dreaming nor of waking, but of both at the same time. As a matter of fact the first question to be answered by a man returning to full waking consciousness is not whether the things, which for a time he had lost sight of, are the same as they were before (a question that without the ego as a point of reference would be meaningless), but whether he is himself. The first reality with which man grapples, thereby grappling with the rest, is his own reality, the identity of himself.

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[2] Cf. my *Preliminari allo studio del fanciullo*, 4th ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1934); and my pamphlet, *La donna e il fanciullo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1934).

[a] Imagines and believes.

8. *Criticism and the Overcoming of Dream Experience*

The thought which judges dreams and excluded them from the realm of experience does not do so altogether and completely. Dreams, too, have their place in that pattern; and on superstitious minds (we need only read Livy or other historians who indulge in fables) a dream can be so suggestive as to become historically memorable. But what is left of the dream is not that which was dreamed, but the act of dreaming. Thus, we can remember what happened to us yesterday as well as what we dreamed last night. The facts of yesterday and the facts dreamed last night will not be on the same level, but the corresponding two experiences will be, though differently evaluated. One is thought to be, so to speak, a perfect experience, the other an imperfect one. And in consequence of the different evaluations of the two experiences the facts connected with one cannot be put on the same level as the facts connected with the other.

On the basis of the foregoing remarks, what makes us value the two experiences so differently? What is the dream reality which is not waking reality and betrays something lacking in the dreaming thought as compared with the waking thought which judges it? We must notice that the waking thought judges the dream by containing it; and it can only do this if the activity of dreaming is something smaller, not greater nor other than the waking activity. What makes the waking activity superior to dreaming is not present in the very beginning; it only comes to light, as we have seen, when thought reaches a certain degree of formation. This implies that: (1) considered in its purely subjective moment, thought is always identical (the two experiences, as we have said, are on the same level); (2) the distinction between the two forms of thinking, which arises from the development of the objective moment of thought itself, is made possible gradually as the system of experience is developed into an objective form of thought, or into the body or world of thought.

So long as thought is simple consciousness of itself all is subjective. But gradually this self, of which thought is the consciousness, grows and puts on flesh, spreads and multiplies, expands and concentrates, and opposes itself to the subject that knows it; thus, thought finds it ever harder to recognize its reflection in this self and to feel, in the intimacy of self-consciousness, the identity between itself as subject and itself as object. And it begins even to suspect and in the end to believe more and more firmly that its ego is one thing and the world another and that the world is nature standing there in absolute antithesis to its ego. Yet, however hard it may be and however we may be tempted to think of the object and subject as distinct, the self-conscious nature of the spirit demands that, at least in the initial and rudimentary stage, the subject realizes itself in a form of consciousness in which the subject and the object are not only conjoined but identified with each other, so that the subject should recognize itself in the object. Even at the stage of sharpest opposition between subject as spirit and object as nature and as long as thought is satisfied with itself at such a stage, the true subject that makes possible the life of the subject (which would be impossible if there really were a nature opposed to it) is not the imaginary nature but the concept of it. The object then is not opposed to the subject but is akin to it, and closely akin, since it is the subject that forms the concept. Starting from this concept, reflecting on it and criticizing it, the process of thought constantly realizes self-consciousness more fully, and overcomes the first illusion of a natural object which cannot be reduced to the subject. It sees that this object is nothing but a product of its own synthetic activity which sets up subject and object together, this activity being the proper activity of the primary subject. On the other hand it is not true that in the subjective stage of rudimentary experience the subject is merely subject and absolutely isolated from any relation to an object. For, as we have seen, all the materials of which thought freely avails itself in dreaming are derived from objective experience. All that is lacking is the completeness of the object as recovered in waking experience (which in fact can return to the dream as to one of its objects and can therefore judge it); and also, with that completeness, there is lacking the existence that belongs to every element which forms the totality of the real world.

To sum up, the dream object, when judged from the point of view of full waking experience, is something but not the whole object and therefore not the real object; it is not the object of the experience which judges and gives the final decision on reality. In this sense we may say truly that the subject has cut itself off from the object; it cuts itself off from the real object (which alone is real because it is the whole), in order to construct one of its own, an *ideal* object, which has all the characteristics of reality except existence and which is intelligible, like the real object, but only abstractly.

And since the object is the form in which the subject exists, the subject, in cutting itself off from the real object, also cuts itself off from the real subject, for the subject exists concretely only in its experience of the world. It no longer identifies itself with that subject which had to be the subject of that object, but it has broken the chains by which they were united and which made it the particular subject of that individual and unique world. Of all the masterful energy with which the subject summed up in itself the richness of its creations to make its world, it retains only what concerns it more nearly and is more peculiarly its own. It retires within itself only to find there a different self. The old self is gone; the new self has forgotten the former experience which still germinates within it and rises to consciousness; this it beholds, but does not recognize, as its own experience. It is indeed a new self, and makes for itself a new world, which is now its own world, the whole world, and therefore the real world, but which will subsequently reveal itself as unreal and merely ideal.

One remark. What we call a dream from the psychological or subjective point of view is sleep from the physiological or objective point of view. Thought, which withdraws within itself because of the failure of the energy that knitted to it the real world as its own, goes to sleep. But to fall asleep is to dream; for, though we have memories more or less vivid or faint and more or less clear or confused in our dreams, it is impossible to remember a night in which we have not dreamed, and it is impossible that thought should ever fail. When it is not awake it is dreaming.

Dreaming is rest, because it is the relief from those waking cares which we call thoughts—thoughts by which the real universe in all its extent comes into existence. In dreaming, which is sleep seen from within, thought escapes the limitations of the real world and roves freely over the boundless realms of subjectivity. It employs the materials of the real world, but only those in which it can feel at home, when it has detached them from the chain of existence and made them its own. It creates its own world.

One final remark. If wakefulness could extend so as to allow thought to realize itself as self-consciousness perfectly by resolving its object, without residuum, in the subject; if what seems to be nature were revealed and understood and felt to be spirit and precisely the spirit which is perceiving, so that nature and spirit could be identified in their completeness and complexity, in their origin and development, in their existence and life; if, consequently, thought encountered no more limits or obstacles and internally regaled itself with the luxuriance of its own life in the life of the universe; if, in short, we felt within us all the pulses of heaven and earth, from the waters thundering in the profound and gloomy chasms of subterranean torrents to the silent motion of the furthest stars: if all these conditions were realized, as I say, sleep would cease to be necessary and waking experience would be dream made real. Our eyes would never need to close, and the freedom, which we can now obtain only in dreams of sleep, we would possess completely and always, with no fear that any awakening should ever come to break the charm of the world which yielded it.

But the supposition is absurd, because the idea of a perfect self-consciousness, which had no limits to overcome, is absurd. It can only help us to illustrate by comparison the nature of that singular form of experience called dreaming; an experience given to mortals with sleep for the solace and comfort of the harsh toil of waking, which is the toil of thought itself, that is to say, of life.

9. *Criticism of the Theory of the Unconsciousness of Art*

Let us come back to the problem of art, though we have really not departed from it. In fact, if a dream could be written down it would be poetry, and many poets, beginning with Dante, have found no better way of describing the ideal character of their poetry than by calling it a dream or vision—an ideality or unreality which, when contemplated in the bright light of imagination, is a living, present reality. It is that inner infinity which, once the charm is broken and man goes back to reality, reveals itself as enclosed in the short span of a dream, and as nothing but a peculiarly subjective situation, excluded from the system of experience, from history, and from the real world. It is the very incapacity for self-criticism; for just as a dream is real until we wake, so the reality in which artistic imagination reveals itself is absolute reality, indistinguishable from that which awaits us in practical life. Art for the artist, *as an artist*, is life itself: therefore, it is not art, just as the dream is not a dream for the sleeper. In short, as the dream would not be a dream without a higher form of experience which comprises and judges it, so we cannot speak of art unless we make it the object of a judgment which is above art. The canvas of art can only be seen fixed in a frame; and it is the canvas not the frame which is art. The frame is, when we talk about art, something other than art; something to be distinguished from it and contrasted with it. We shall call it criticism, reflection on art, philosophy, history. But whatever else it may be, insofar as it focuses on art and reveals it to our consciousness, it is not art.

Here we come back to the second of the difficulties mentioned before (section 5 above). We have already discussed that of the extreme subjectivity to which the existence of art must be exposed in order to reveal itself. When this difficulty has been overcome, the other arises. Art in its independent existence cannot be known; it eludes every effort of thought to grasp it. Art, like dreaming, does not consist in the thought which can and does pronounce it to be art, nor in reflection about it, nor in the criticism which tries to understand it and make it intelligible, nor in the history of it, however laboriously detailed, nor yet in the philosophy which defines it. In these and similar forms of thought, art has vanished, just as has the dream when one speaks of it. Therefore, while art is going on, it is not recognized as art; when we can say: "Here is art!" it is all over.

We must not suppose that this is just what happens with all forms of reality taken to be unconscious, such as mere material things. These, when left to their unconsciousness, as they are supposed to exist in themselves, are unknown; and as soon as they become known, they are no longer material things but conscious ideas. Alleged unconsciousness is a mere myth which thought only entertains from an inadequate knowledge of itself and of the true relation between itself and things. But even if these unconscious and material things existed, art is not material, nor yet is it unconscious. Even dreaming is conscious and, so long as it lasts, its consciousness is perfect. But art is more conscious than anything else; for in it all the powers of the spirit are awake, present and active. In the instance taken above, of reading a poem, no less concentrated and careful attention is required than is demanded for considering a critical essay on the same poem.

The unconsciousness of art is relative. Art lacks the consciousness of those forms of thought with which we reflect on art. In relation to these forms, it may appear similar to the life of a plant or an animal, or to instinctive movements below the level of thought which may enlighten or perhaps inhibit them; or it may appear similar to the "common sense" which seems to be founded on intuition and which, according to a poet, was killed by science *to see what it was made of.*

The unconsciousness of art, then, is relative; but necessary in its relativity. For, if we wish to understand art, it cannot be abstracted from its relation to thought; and, compared with thought, the consciousness of art is negligible. If, on the other hand, we renounce the understanding of art, and we content ourselves with reviving and enjoying it, then indeed it is conscious in its own way; but as revealed to such consciousness it has no marks to distinguish it from the critical or logical forms of thought. The fact is that artists of strongly artistic temperament, who live intensely in their art, shun with loathing all critical or philosophical reflection, because outside their art they are blind: they are eternal dreamers. Critics and philosophers, on the other hand, suffer from chronic sleeplessness; they are accused of coldness and esthetic insensibility, because the forms of their thought lead them outside art. All these considerations are rough and empirical and, therefore, strictly speaking, inaccurate; but they contain a grain of truth; namely that the esthetic actuality and the logical or critical actuality are mutually exclusive.

We must choose between art and the philosophy of art, dreaming or waking. In the world of philosophy there is no art, for we cannot dream while awake. This would not matter if philosophy really were that tenant of the top story. But philosophy is every man's life, that is, practical life. For practical life must develop in the world which is also the philosopher's world; that is, not in the world of the artist, but in the real world, where if we do good we do a real good and really do it, and if we do ill it is an ill that matters. Here we are in touch with the works of God. It is easy to say: "Let us give up philosophy and stick to art." But when all the fog of metaphysics is blown away, and the horizon is clear, and man is enveloped in the dream of art, all at once within that dream the sky is darkened again. Just when the poet is complete master of the world which he had created there arise before him and within him the enemies—pain, betrayal, deception, and death. So even in his dreams man awakes and finds that he is a man of flesh and blood, with a heart that lives in the tumult of life and struggles with others and with himself, and he is carried away by the storm of his passion. Since the real world is not absolutely everything, it can be idealized and transformed. But here, within the infinite dream, the world is everything and stands squarely against us. So in the ideal itself the real reappears and man lives and thinks and philosophizes.

10. *Romanticism and Classicism*

Thus criticism is immanent in art. It is a sort of watch, though restrained and discrete, on the spontaneous genius of the artist. It is that "bridle of art" without which there would be no discipline, measure, harmony, or anything that in the narrow sense is called art. The ideal models of classical art became, owing to the Renaissance and its classical theories of poetry, despotic dictators of rules applied mechanically to genuine poetical inspiration. But from the first decade of the last century the romantic movement, in opposition to this, vindicated and exalted the worth of actual passions as a source of the purest and most powerful inspiration. From that time onward it has been customary to distinguish two types, almost two species, of art: the classical, which concerns itself with rules and with reflection, and the romantic, which concentrates all the life and strength of art in feeling and unconscious spontaneity. But no sooner had classicism and romanticism been sharply contrasted as ancient and modern or archaic and modernist, in conformity with the two tendencies described, than suddenly, as so often happens, attempts were made (not without success), to unearth romantic elements in classical literature. And then someone comes forward with the astonishing discovery that all the substance of classical poetry is to be found unaltered in the great romantics! I need only remark that the greatest romantic of Italy, in the essential meaning of the term, was Manzoni—the poet of greatest lyrical strength that Italian poetry can boast[3]—and that in Manzoni self-criticism and reflection on his own inspiration reached the point of irony.

The truth is that in this case, as in many others, we have applied the label of a literary period or tendency, or of an historical fact, to what was really a state of mind or a moment of the spiritual process, which in such a period received a particular emphasis, but which is always immanent, as a spiritual attitude, in the productions of every period. There may be poetical imitations according to the canons of a school—imitations of no esthetic value, in which the classical rules are applied with complete disregard for romantic motives; similarly, there may be gushing and pointless effusions of emotion which are meaningless because they try to pour out the whole heart and utter words as they come without rhyme or reason; but all poetry that moves us and holds our attention is at once classical and romantic, in varying proportions of the two elements, but never to the exclusion of either. A purely classical art would be frigid, empty—a shadow without a body. A purely romantic art would be a formless body without outline. Both would be absurd.

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[3] Someone was scandalized by this definition; but I suspect that this someone has little familiarity with Manzoni's poetry.

So we have to admit that an art which is altogether naïve and relatively unconscious is an ideal invented by us, nothing with a real existence. We may say that art is a dream, but this is true only to a certain point. To be altogether a dream it would have to be unaware of itself; it would have to be left to its primary impulses, Platonically called poetic madness. In this case the spirit, possessed by frenzy and no longer master of its emotions, would lose the conscious discrimination and discipline which is said not to be art, but reflection and self-criticism guided by concepts and rules and laws which are known and admitted by thought. In dreams we speak without control, without weighing or even considering the words we use. But it is impossible when awake to pronounce a word even silently without trying it and weighing it and controlling it in the very act of uttering it; and when the first inspiration has not suggested to us a word so appropriate or expressive as we would wish, we substitute another. It is very easy to scoff romantically at grammar, and fling it in the faces of the pedants who take up arms against a Cellini. But the fact is that besides the grammar written out and systematized in its empirical rules, there is a certain unwritten grammar, like the illustrious laws obeyed by Antigone. These laws are in the head of every man who speaks, and strongest in the head of the man who speaks best, that is, in the most effective and expressive way. The grammar bridles his tongue and saves him from uttering words without the logical connection which the rules of grammar define, sometimes ill and sometimes well, but on the whole well enough. There is no difference of any sort between this unwritten but living grammar and the venerable grammar of well-established textbooks, for the latter obviously derives from the former.[4]

Grammar, rhetoric, esthetics, philosophy are all forms of thought which, in union with literary art, generate criticism. They are all thought, but so closely connected with the actual work of art that they can in no way be separated. There is no writer so unruly that, in giving vent to his eccentricity, he does not prove to have before him an ideal formula for his eccentricity. And this is a significant fact, for it confirms the remarks already made on the limits of the analogy between art and dreaming. But these remarks at the same time lead us to define more strictly the concept of art, so that we may proceed to determine what the existing thing is which may be called art.

We are in fact compelled to allow that, although the two elements of art and criticism are inseparably conjoined, they are none the less abstractly distinguishable. For if they were fused into one thing, it would be obvious that art could no longer be that spiritual life which is the object of criticism, nor could criticism be understood as a reflection on art; in short there would no longer be the relation between judgment and its object or between the thought which is thought about and the thought which is thinking about it. We can talk of criticism only if there is art, and of art only if there is criticism which admits it. The two terms then are inseparable but distinguishable.

What is our final conclusion? It is twofold. (1) The artistic element in a work of art does not exhaust all that the work contains, but only covers what remains when we have abstracted the elements of criticism, reflection, and conscious thought in general.

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[4] See "Concetto della grammatica" (1910), in my *Frammenti di estetica* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1920), pp. 179–194.

(2) This residuum is only distinguishable in abstract; in actuality it cannot be separated from the entire body of the work.

The first conclusion warns us that pure art does not exist. It is not the actual life of the spirit, but enters into it and its presence contributes to the realization of such a life which exists only in its concrete activity. Art is immanent in the life of the spirit and transcends it, like the Kantian *a priori.* It is not an experience that we can have in life but the transcendental principle of artistic experience. It gives life to the body of art but is itself invisible. What we see is the living body. In reading a poem, in entering, as it were, into the soul of the living thing, we feel it stirring, we are aware of the inner principle which moves our heart, but we cannot see it face to face, define it, understand it, make it the object of reflective experience. It is a *je ne sais quoi*, a god who is present but hides himself, *Deus absconditus.*[°] It masters us and moves our tongue and carries us away, like that mysterious force which inspires the dreams that tempt us to believe in them as divine inspirations or true warnings.

The second conclusion shows us the folly of the chemical analysis intended to distinguish what is poetry and what is not poetry in the works of a poet, or even in a single poem, as if the two elements could actually be separated and poetry (or what is commonly understood by the name) could be found like a salt precipitated in a test tube. The most subtle and accurate analysis, carried on to infinity, will still reveal the unpoetical element in the heart of every grain of poetry. Moreover, every analysis, when we come to look at it, presupposes an *a priori* synthesis, in which the alleged poetical element unites itself to the despised unpoetical, as embroidery to canvas, or a lighted figure to the background of shade on which it can stand out; or as a capital unites itself to the bare supporting column, a capital in which the living spirit unfolds or closes or convolves itself as if to gather up its energies for some aspiring effort. Indeed, the union of the poetical with the

[°] A hidden god.

unpoetical element is but an instance of the indissoluble marriage of intuition to thought.

If the analytical critics or estheticians carried out their method to its logical conclusion, they could find in their hands at last, not a grain of pure poetry, but nothing; for the transcendental, outside experience, is nothing. But, like most people who have taken a wrong turn, they prudently stop halfway. They point out, for instance, almost like Bettinelli[p] in his *Virgilian Letters*,[5] that very few episodes of Dante would remain above questioning. It would not bother them that even these remnants, if we consider them carefully, are not at all intelligible without reference to the structure of the poem, that is to say, to the thought and concrete personality of the poet, who has a language of his own; and that whatever he says is always a consequence of his concrete personality.

[5] See letter III.

[p] Saverio Bettinelli (1718–1808), Italian critic and Jesuit priest, a friend of Voltaire's. His *Lettere virgiliane* (1756) are a libelous attack on Dante.

II

Form

1. *The Artistic Element in Every Work of Art*

We know now where to look for art, although, as we have seen, its existence cannot be discovered as any actual thing or in any living thought. At this stage of our inquiry, we can say that art is in the spirit and in the living spirit (in the spirit, therefore, of the man who is reading a poem, while he is reading it, and not in that of the author who wrote it). But within this whole, we must strip off from the spirit its living form, which is thought, reflection, judgment, in order to reach, in abstract, the true and peculiar kernel of pure art. It is necessary for us to see what in a work of art is thought, from which we must abstract in order to isolate and define that inner essence that is nothing but art.

We have already said that the consciousness accompanying art is simply the form of all perfect thought, which is self-consciousness; that is, the consciousness in which the knowing subject recognizes itself in the object and thus, in the object, is conscious of itself as a definite consciousness of the object. If this holds good, it becomes clear that to abstract from thought is simply to abstract from the concrete realization of self-consciousness which is achieved through its movement from the subject to the object and back again to the subject. In order to reach, within a work of art, the element which gives value to art and to all spiritual life, we must mentally discount this movement and fix our attention only on its starting point. What is absolutely absurd, and therefore unthinkable, is to suppose that there is unconscious thought or a self-consciousness which is not thought, the whole of thought.

2. *The Ego in the Form of Subject*

In order to soothe those restless consciences which take umbrage on hearing the word "subject," against which for centuries accusations have been heaped and multiplied, let us say at once that the word is not used to indicate exclusively something opposed to the object. The only opposition consistent with the logic of our philosophy is the one arising necessarily from the nature of the things opposed, so that neither of them can be thought of as something absolute, standing alone and independent of the other. All opposition presupposes a necessary relation between the terms, that is, a synthetic activity which posits them in the act of opposing them. At the beginning this relation or the generating principle of this relation is pure subjectivity. And although this principle posits itself first as subject, already within that subject there is the power which will generate the object. Just so, in nature, the new-born child, who will in due course be a father with a child of his own, must come before that child if he is to be the father; but he can only be the father if he was born with the very same generative power (to speak scholastically for the sake of brevity) to which both the birth of his child and his own birth are due. A man can never be a father unless he possesses within himself the principle by which he himself exists and his children can come into existence. So it is, too, with the generative virtue of the subject, a virtue which is something more than mere self-creation. For this reason it is called the ego, meaning thereby no abstract subject but the unity and identity of subject and object.

To recapitulate: the word subject means the ego in its subjective form. This form is purely abstract or, as we have said, transcendental; but, as we shall see more clearly, it is the first principle of all reality. In what then, does this abstract form come short of reality? In the opposition of the object to the subject, and consequently in their mutual permeation. Thought, and with thought the world of infinite reality, is only constructed by this process.

But the germ of this process lies in the subject or the ego which has the subjective form. To try to have the object without a subject and to confine the universe to a detached and absolute object, would be to hang this universe from one end of a string with no chance of finding a hook on which to hang the other.

3. *The Meaning of the Distinction between Art and Thought*

Art, then, as Socrates would agree, looks as if it were all in the subjective moment of the spirit; and we may say that artistic form, which everybody has experienced within himself, or, to speak more exactly, the form of certain spiritual products or, better still, of a kind of spiritual experience that has artistic value, is the form of the ego as pure subject. If we tried to grasp this form in its immediate existence, it would prove, as we said, a vain shadow. But in experience it reveals itself and proves, through the mediation of the complete act of thinking, that, besides being pure subjectivity, it is also pure objectivity, that is, the reconciliation of these abstract apposites in the concrete reality of self-consciousness.

This first glimpse of the existence of art has already yielded its definition. In fact, it became possible for us to discover the existence of art, as we gradually worked toward this definition.

But our definition is not one of those which, as soon as they are stated, gain assent and satisfy the mind. The major difficulty immediately facing this definition arises from the implication that art is everything and, therefore, nothing in particular. Since a definition defines only insofar as it distinguishes, nothing is defined as long as everything remains undistinguished. If the form of the ego as pure subjectivity, is immanent in concrete thought and exists only in this thought, we can never have pure subjectivity; art, therefore, can never be grasped. What we can find will be only thought, which is the resolution of pure subjectivity into the actuality of self-consciousness. We shall never have a work of art which is not also a work of thought. A work of thought is, therefore, also a work of art for the very same reasons that a work of art is a work of thought.

The difficulty is only apparent, for, if we reflect, there is no real difficulty at all. If we accept the definition I have indicated I may say that the distinction between art and thought does not vanish. Rather—to use an illustrative comparison for what it is worth—it follows a transversal instead of a perpendicular line of demarcation. The Kantian distinction between intuition and concept follow exactly a cross-section line,[a] yet no one ever denied that this is a clear distinction which goes deep into the nature of spiritual life. We all know Kant's famous saying that intuitions without concepts are blind, and thoughts without a subject matter of intuition empty;[b] and consequently we all know that, according to him, in experience there are not intuitions on the one hand and concepts on the other, but that all experience is a synthesis *a priori* of the two terms, as we find it in the judgment. And since we have mentioned Kant, we may also mention Baumgarten[c] and his *scientia cognitionis sensitivae* or theory of sensuous knowledge, which he identified with Esthetics, contrasting it with Logic or theory of intellectual knowledge, as though it were possible to have sensuous knowledge entirely devoid of intellectual elements! We find it repeated, with reference to Vico, that philosophers are the *intellect* of mankind and poets the *senses*[d]—the senses being conceived of, not as feeling without awareness, but as "awareness accompanied by emotion" without yet being *reflection*. But how is it possible to talk of sensations unless they have been somehow taken up into intellectual knowledge? Sense and intellect have always been distinguished with the necessary admission that the two cognitive functions are essentially connected. In fact, those who oppose this point of view do not proceed from the philosophy of the spirit, to which the distinction of the forms of the spirit into stages (a cross section and not a split) is quite familiar. They start rather from the point of view of empirical knowledge, which splits reality from top to bottom; they consequently find themselves with one thing to their right and another to their left, or rather surrounded by things not only distinguishable but separate, each of which stands, or seems to stand, independently. On one side is the *Orlando furioso* and a little way off the *De immortalitate animae* by Pomponazzi,[*] two works of the human spirit, just as they were two things.

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[a] Instead of separating elements that are really side by side, it artificially separates one stratum from another that is continuous with it.

[b] *Critique of Pure Reason*, § 75.

[c] *Aesthetica*, § I (published in 1750–1758).

[d] *Scienza nuova*, Sect. II No. liii (published in 1725–1730). See Vico, *Opere*, ed. by F. Nicolini (Naples: Ricciardi, 1953), p. 455.

But philosophy knows that, even if there are many things, there are not many spiritual beings. Whenever we make a sharp division between one spirit and another, or between one section of the spirit and another, we are soon forced to realize that each spirit, or portion of reality thus separated, lacks something which must be regarded as essential to the nature of the spirit. So, in the end, if we go deeper into that nature, we will find that multiplicity vanishes and what remains is unity. Strictly speaking, not only are there no pure philosophers or poets, but there are not even men who are more philosophical than poetical or vice versa. For man is always the one Spirit. And not only are his works not diverse—now a work of art, now a work of thought—but they are all one. They are not beads which thought can collect, when they have been made, and string together like a rosary. No doubt there is the appearance of multiplicity, but a multiplicity which may be called purely material. While our attention is fixed on the appearance, something more divine escapes us. It is like looking at books, placed in a row, without reading them, or like reading them mechanically without understanding them. For if we read with understanding, we can, after finishing the *Furioso*, also read the *De immortalitate* (which indeed will help us to understand the poem more thoroughly, just as every page of the book throws light on the preceding ones). But to talk of reading the one "after" the other implies a duality which can only be thought of when we are not reading, or not understanding, either Ariosto or Pomponazzi. They are just put side by side as both outside the spirit, as two things, not two elements of the spirit. The spirit of Pomponazzi has breathed, and thrived on, the very air of the *Furioso;* and so in him there is not Ariosto *and* Pomponazzi, but Pomponazzi alone. It is the same in reading his book. Either we spiritually realize nothing or what we realize is a spiritual unity, outside of which can remain nothing with any claims to spiritual value.

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[*] Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), Italian philosopher and leading representative of Renaissance Aristotelianism.

4. *Unreality of Pure Art*

Art in its actuality is art that has become thought. Pure art is unreal and is therefore intangible. This does not mean that it does not exist; but only that it cannot be separated from the whole spiritual act in which it exists and exhibits all its existential energy. If we lay aside the *De immortalitate animae* and confine ourselves to the *Orlando furioso*, we have indeed a great work of art; for we feel in it a powerful living force gushing up from the deep spring of the poet's subjectivity, which is Ariosto's soul, all that he was and felt as the peculiar form of the human spirit which made him the unique individual he was. But the water from this spring spreads and collects thus forming a boundless lake, which is far from stagnant, for there is life in it animating the whole, a life coming from an inexhaustible source. From the divine spring of poetry a thought gushes out which contains the whole world of the poet, all that he pondered or makes us ponder, thought and makes us think. If we read coldly or inattentively we may understand what he says, but we miss the soul that speaks in what he says, and which reveals itself, not by a rational presentation, but by infusing his life into the subject of his speech and raising the tone from that of prosaic narrative to lyric song. Art that, as the poet says, is "omnipotent, invisible" reveals itself, indeed, but only in the act of doing and not in the subject matter of its doing. The subject matter is a fable, a myth, something that thought pictures, an objective fact that can be imagined, so that it seems everybody's property and nobody's. Its material, for instance, may be that of medieval epics, treated over and over again in popular ballads, or of traditional romances, or of a whole set of poems; mere material to be found, more or less, in the *Furioso*, but existing before it. I say "more or less," because this material is presented in schematic form abstractly and is defined in summaries which do not apply exactly to any of the so-called sources of the *Furioso*. In fact it is something abstract which, when looked at in its concreteness, in any of the sources or in the great poem itself, always takes a particular form due to the more or less active and vigorous minds which have appropriated it and rediscovered it within themselves.

5. *False Distinction between Art and Thought*

All attempts—and many have been made—to define the proper subject matter for art are absurd. For there cannot be a subject matter which is in itself poetic, and one which is prosaic and only proper for scientific or philosophical treatment. Consequently all attempts to define art by the nature of its subject matter are meaningless. Art and thought cannot divide the universe between them as Saturn's children did.

In the first place, it is false to distinguish art and scientific knowledge as having different objects, namely, the particular, or individual, and the universal. Aristotle in his *Poetics* already pointed out that we always attribute to poetry a certain universality denied to history. In fact, there is no artistic representation, however particular it may be (even a portrait) which does not raise the mind above that mortal world to which all particular things and men belong, by hinting at something immortal, divine and infinite. Even the most abstract ideas often have power to move our hearts by the deep feeling with which they have been thought and expressed. Books of religious or philosophical meditation have an unquestioned place in the history of poetry, though they may require elect and subtle minds or special doctrinal preparation for their appreciation and enjoyment.

Secondly, it is equally false to distinguish *imagination* and *understanding* as faculties or functions corresponding to two different types of objects or products of the spirit. We shall call *imagination* the artistic activity of the spirit, provided that we are allowed to designate by this only a subjective form of spiritual activity which has no concrete reality by itself. But such imagination is neither a faculty nor a special function of our inner activity, for this is always thought, although various *moments of its development* may be distinguishable. When this development is accomplished, the end result is nothing but thought in the rich complexity and totality of all its elements and therefore of its essential form. In such thought, which is all compact and uniform, we can no longer distinguish an imaginative from an intellectual or logical element, for the stage of pure imagination has been superseded. Or, to put it better, imagination and thought are one and the same thing; the former has been absorbed by the latter and exists within it in the logical form.

It is false to distinguish imagination and understanding if we take the first as the thought of something nonexistent, freely created by the spirit, and the second as the thought of what exists or is true, which confines the mind within objective limits. After what we have said about the relation and distinction between the experiences of dreaming and waking, it is clear that no distinction of this kind within the abstract matter of thought is possible. Nothing considered in the abstract and apart from its relation to the knowing subject can be either true or false, either existent or nonexistent.

It is false to distinguish between objects of imagination and objects of pure thought, as if the first had a concrete body and the second were bodiless. This is a relic of the old dualistic theory of sense and understanding, in which the sense was linked to external bodies by the sentient body. The only conceivable body, as that around which and with which every other body forms a unified physical system, is *our own*, as we have seen.[1] It is the one which is a body because it is felt, and not felt because it is a body. And its bodily nature is nothing but that fundamental feeling by which the ego constructs and affirms itself. It is the bodily nature of the ego, which must always be present, as the ego is. And the emotional or passional intensity with which a thought asserts itself is proportionate not to its proximity to bodies supposed to affect our minds through the senses, but to the amount of self, so to speak, which the ego puts into the thought. In fact there are things which, to judge from their usual effects, ought to pierce our hearts and make them tremble with pity and horror, but which yet leave a man, who is thinking of something else and scarcely notices them, quite indifferent. On the other hand there are abstract problems of mathematics and philosophy which make our hearts beat with an excitement that obliterates hunger and sleep and sometimes gives us an abysmal anguish. The objects of imagination may indeed be of a bodily nature; but not of that false and incomprehensible bodily nature that opposes a body to another and separates the spirit from things and even from other spirits. They are, instead, of that intimate and fundamental bodily nature of the ego, which extends from so-called sensations (that is, thoughts directed to spatial and temporal things) to the purest ideas of things infinite and eternal.

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[1] Introduction, chap. III, § 6.

6. *The Content of Art*

What is called, then, the *subject matter* or the *content* of art is something foreign to the sphere of art, though inseparably connected with it. It is thought, the thought about anything whatever, the union of perception and reflection, imagination and judgment, as all thought is. And poetry or art consists entirely in the form which is given to this material.

It has been said that the *content is an antecedent of art*. It is so in the same sense as the subject of a book precedes the book itself. The author who sets out to write a book must surely know in advance what he is going to deal with. But the subject matter which antecedes art is only the *abstract content*, and, as such, it can be summarily defined by anyone who wants to see in the work of art how much of his own the artist has put into his creation, and for this purpose views whatever he learns through the work of art as being antecedent to it. But we know that this reconstruction and projection into the past is purely analytical and hypothetical; it is only useful for the abstract distinction of two elements in a living organism when we want to isolate one of them so as to define it exactly. But those who allow themselves seriously to believe that the subject matter, thus abstracted after the event, had been already present in the artist's spirit before he created his work, need only to remember the Horatian words: *Amphora coepit institui, currente rota cur urceus exit?*[f] The potter's wheel is always playing such tricks; the subject matter is altered by the hands of every author and grows in the womb of creative art. The abstract content is as unreal as pure art or as that mere form in which art strictly consists. The two elements coalesce and assimilate, so that a given form has always its uniquely appropriate matter and the matter its uniquely appropriate form. Strictly speaking the indefinite subject matter, from which the artist starts, certainly does not possess the determinations it gradually takes on under his hands, but still it is not entirely indeterminate. If it were, it would not have the individuality that makes it a desirable subject to treat and with which the artist falls in love. It is the matter, yet it already has its form, the two being enclosed together as in one germ, which will develop and unfold its potential articulations as it grows to a complete organism.

What is the painter's "blot"?[g] What is that "inspiration" which suddenly makes the poet's heart leap as if a god within him were dictating his words? It is the first idea, still dim, but now and again flushing with illumination; the seed still folded up, but alive and quick with hidden energies only waiting to spring to light; it is the low hum of swarming life, still undifferentiated, but filled with vitality, ready to awake, to break its prison, and to take on an individual form. Art is already born;

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[f] *Ars poetica*, v. 22: "The potter sets up an urn, but his wheel throws off a jug."

[g] Macchia. "Blotting" appears to have been the term used by A. Cozens (1717–1786), for his method of suggesting a pictorial design created by chance splashes of ink. During the 1850's a group of Italian painters who followed a similar method were called "macchiaioli." See Vittorio Imbriani, *Critica d'arte e prose narrative*, ed. by G. Doria (Bari: Laterza, 1937), pp. 42–51.

still an infant, but completely formed, with none of its baby limbs lacking. The *motif* may develop into a great symphony, but it is already art, for it already attests to the presence of a soul. The germ of every work of art, as it first emerges in the artist's mind, inviting and urging him to creation, is like the Leibnizian monad, a potential infinity, a microcosm.

To sum up, the term *content* is twofold. On the one hand it is the *abstract content*, which supposes the work of art, but does not precede it; on the other it is the *concrete content*, assumed by the artist's spirit because it is not a mere content, but has already a form and is already art, that is, the original nucleus of the art that is to be.

7. *The Form of Art*

By thus excluding the content from the world of art we have defined our concept of form, in which the essence of art consists. It has become clear that the form of which we are speaking is what remains when from any actual thought we abstract ideally its content, namely, all that is being thought about. It is a special form, not the only form of which we may speak when studying the nature of the spirit. The spirit is never anything but thought, for it has the form of thought, which is *logical form.* And being thought, it is always *action*, or creation of reality (that is, of itself), and therefore has the *ethical form* which is proper to action. But this last is not merely joined to the logical form as another form, but is the same form considered as the form of action until action reveals itself for what it really is—thought.

The form of art is not identical with the form of thinking, since art, as we have seen, is not thought but its living energy. It is the soul of thought, not its body—that pure soul which we distinguish as the *first principle* of life, from which the creature draws its whole being and makes itself a determinate body in which and by which it really lives. This soul in itself, prior to the body which it animates, is the peculiar form in which art consists.

Those who are unable to concentrate their attention on this soul in itself, this life principle of all spiritual products, which is nothing by itself but present everywhere, may stand forever at the door of art, but can never open it and can never experience the feeling that art offers. It is to this principle alone, this hidden but ever present soul, that all the value of beauty belongs, which we shall never discover unless in our study of art we remain within the strictest formalism.

8. *Beauty as Value*

Beauty, as a character of spiritual life, is value. Value implies freedom, for it is synonymous with choice. Every value, therefore, has a correlative disvalue, its contrary, to which it is to be preferred—beauty to ugliness, truth to falsehood, good to evil. The preference of value to disvalue is absolute, so that he who does not prefer it contradicts his essential nature. But preference or choice requires not only pure contemplation but also will. And the will must be free; it must act as it does, not from causes which determine it, but because it determines itself, spontaneously, to act upon recognition of the value of its object or of its undertaking. Without such freedom good cannot be distinguished from evil, nor can truth be opposed to falsehood. And, as we have observed,[2] the absolute impossibility of renouncing every distinction between truth and error is the strongest argument for holding that thinking beings are free and that the whole spiritual life unfolds in freedom.

Hence it is clear that to speak of natural beauty, meaning by nature something opposed to spirit—the realm of mechanism where freedom is impossible—would imply that we could divorce the concept of beauty from that of value. This would mean that, in speaking of natural forms, we would put beauty and ugliness on the same level and we would no longer distinguish one from the other. We would thus contradict ourselves by speaking of a beauty that is not beautiful and of an ugliness that is not ugly.

Natural beauty has been and is spoken of in two senses, in both of which an attempt is made to escape this contradiction and to avoid the absurdity of assigning value to mechanical products. Either we attribute an internal purpose to nature, so as to spiritualize it and make it a rudimentary form of the spirit (in this case, natural beauty would be the work of a mighty art which achieves its triumphs before the advent of the human spirit); or else we regard nature as a mirror reflecting our feelings (and in this case beauty would not belong to unconscious nature but to the man whose eyes see in a landscape the reflection or expression of his own state of mind). In this second instance the natural object is selected by an artistic activity external to the spirit, and is used just as a sculptor uses his marble or any artist his physical medium to externalize (as has been said) his own images.

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[2] Cf. above, Introduction, chap. II, § 4.

Both these meanings of natural beauty are inadmissible because of their philosophical presuppositions. For we cannot justify the concept of a nature which, though itself not spirit, is none the less guided by an internal purpose; nor can we conceive of that sort of dualism which opposes to spirit an external nature that limits it, and so leaves room for accidental coincidences or correspondences between the two kinds of reality. We shall see in due time the right way of understanding natural beauty. Philosophers may deny it, but they themselves continue to feel and exalt it, just as common men do.

Here it must be enough to have pointed out that the spiritual character which is the mark of esthetic value and of every other value, proves that the spirit achieves its freedom in the esthetic form—the very form which is the first, original, and therefore, it would seem, the *immediate* form of spiritual life.

III

The Dialectic of Form

1. *The Immediacy and Freedom of the Esthetic Form*

A very important problem is the one which concerns the understanding of the immediacy with which the esthetic form reveals itself. Immediacy is nature. Freedom arises in a process of development, when what was immediate ceases to be so and is mediated. Thought in general is free because it is mediated; it is the negation of being (nature) and is therefore becoming. *Poeta nascitur?* No, for if poetry were a natural fact, like a waterfall, it would lose all value.

Yet men have often been tempted to picture the poetic impulse as something natural, and the divine art in general as a gift granted to the few "whom Zeus loved." They have often thought of condemning false art on the ground that it is the product of will rather than of spontaneous inspiration—the inspiration which, like an uncontrollable power, overwhelms the artist's soul and drives him into a kind of frenzy.

But these are rough and inexact generalizations which contain nonetheless some truth, though not definite, precise, and complete. Meantime it is clear that freedom implies will. For if freedom is allowed in knowledge itself (which in this case may be true or false), no philosopher would refuse to allow the presence of the will, in some form, in cognitive thinking as well. Without the will—the energy which reforms and transforms his original nature—man cannot attain the good or do anything right; he cannot even reach truth or succeed in putting together two words which make sense. No doubt, then, that the freedom to create values implies also that these values are the result of a voluntary act. If the artist were merely a "chosen vessel" he would be as devoid of creative art as a fiddlestring, and the true artist would be not Paganini, but God. This would not solve the problem of the spontaneity or voluntariness of art—two qualities which appear to be contradictory: it would merely change it.

On the other hand, if spontaneity and voluntariness were really contradictories, we would have to choose between them; not only would we have to deny voluntariness to art, if art is spontaneous, but spontaneity to thought and action because they are undoubtedly voluntary. Yet spontaneity, although less often noticed, is just as undeniably present in all cognitive and practical processes as it is in art. In fact, artificiality, which comes from the will, is constantly criticized in these processes as well as in art. For it degrades reasoning to the level of sophistry, consistency to consequential pedantry, conscientiousness to puritanism, and so on. Also in thinking, reasoning, and demonstrating, there is and ought to be a simplicity, a terseness, a mastery, a rapidity of intuition, a judgment, which are all marks of an instinctive and natural activity. For in nature everything is fixed by "weight and measure," everything is in due proportion, bounded by necessary limits, with no superfluities or accretions, in fact nothing artificial. Intuition is the word with which we hope to define the peculiar activity of the artist, for his activity falls short of voluntariness. He dwells in the bosom of a sort of spiritual *nature* and enjoys the privilege of some kind of immediate revelation. For the word intuition (which has been used and abused ever since Plato and still remains somewhat suggestively vague) implies immediacy, that is, the activity of the spirit working at the level of nature and therefore making no mistakes. And so working, it rises above itself, for it presupposes that absolute reality and truth which lie beyond the spirit. Intuition is the artist's secret!

Yet intuition is just as necessary to the man of science, not only for unexpected, or apparently unexpected, discoveries which might be said to come by luck, but for the clear insight which should accompany all his observations and deductions. And it is necessary, too, for the man of action who needs a quick grasp of things in order to orient himself rapidly and get to his goal by the shortest route. Without such an intuition both thinker and man of action will be like blind travellers groping along a dark road with a lantern. Sight, and good sight that allows a man to look out and see without tiring his eyes, is necessary for observation, whatever instruments the observer uses, and however powerful the lens with which he magnifies distant objects or those invisible to the naked eye.

It may still be said that this intuitive element, felt in every grade of spiritual development, is the artistic element—indestructible and constant because essential to all the life of the spirit. But if intuition excluded will, it would have to give way and disappear whenever the will clearly asserted its presence. It should not happen, as it does, that, with the development and strengthening of the will and the consequent fortifying of thought, this power of intuition constantly increases in intensity and certainty; so that the man of genius clears and sharpens his native insight by thought and action, while he rusts and corrodes it by intellectual and practical sloth.

We must admit then that there is no antithesis between intuition and will. We shall throw some more light on this obscure word which is taken to mean some sort of sudden mental vision.

2. *Intuition and Idealism*

We must first notice that whenever philosophers have talked of intuition (Plato, Descartes, Kant, Schelling, Rosmini,[a] Gioberti[b]) their adoption of the hypothesis of a direct experience, in which the self-constructive activity of the thinking subject had no part, has always been motivated by a realistic prejudice.[1] This prejudice has led them to remove from the thinking subject, inherently defective and limited, the reality which philosophers who are not skeptic have endeavored to establish as the universal touchstone of human knowledge and action—the reality of something objective. They called this an objective reality, not because it is related to the subject, but because it reveals itself to the subject whenever this enters into relation with it. Objective reality is therefore contrasted to the subject. Not only is it objective—would say Rosmini—but it is objective for the very reason that it is unconnected with the subject.

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[a] Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855), Italian philosopher, priest, patriot. His major works, such as *New Essay on the Origin of Ideas*, *Maxims of Christian Perfection*, *Theodicy*, *Psychology*, reflect to a large extent his Catholic faith.

[b] Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852), Italian philosopher, priest, political writer. His major philosophical works are: *Introduzione allo studio della filosofia* and *Teorica del soprannaturale*.

An object which became the object of a subject by virtue of the subject's constructive process would be part of that subject's nature, the product of it. In short, there would be nothing but the subject, which would create the object, that is, what it considers to be its object. On the other hand, a real object, independent of the subject, would face the subject, though this has done nothing to bring the object into existence. Something similar is presumed by naïve psychologists concerning sight. They think that a man sees, even without wanting to, simply because an object is before his eyes, even if his eyes or nervous system take no active interest in it.

The doctrine of intuition has been based, since Plato, on the presupposition that the object exists before it comes into relation with the subject. Hence, the theory of an innate knowledge, which does not result from any experience or reflection of an active mind, but is given as a first principle, an absolute starting point for all the subject's activity. This dogmatic assumption is entirely arbitrary and philosophy has ever since made desperate efforts to free itself of it. We may take Kant as an example. With his critical philosophy he wages war on dogmatism, and yet the whole of his critical idealism is in the end confined within the limits of two sheer dogmas. On one side there is the noumenon which is unknowable, because the intellectual intuition needed to know the thing in itself is denied to the human spirit; on the other there is the given manifold of experience which is apprehended by sense intuition. These two intuitions, one possible and the other impossible for the human spirit, hold it enclosed within itself, warning it that reality is alien to it. On the one hand it catches a glimpse of this reality, thanks to an immediate relation which wakes the spirit from its natural sleep and puts it in possession of something it could never have given itself and which therefore must come from outside. On the other, it suspects, believes, argues that this reality must exist on its own account, but that we are unable to reach it because it is separated from us by a chasm where there is no bridge. The higher kind of intuition which could have provided that bridge is denied to us.

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[1] See my early study *Rosmini e Gioberti.*, part II, chap. 2 (Pisa: Nistri, 1899).

Modern Idealism has gradually freed itself from this obscure idea of intuition, which blocks the spirit either in the early or in the ultimate states of the development in which its nature consists. The process of the spirit is mediation and therefore does not allow immediacy which belongs to intuition.

In this criticism of intuition, innate ideas, and immediate knowledge, idealism found a powerful ally in empiricism. But empiricism did not see through all the enemy's disguises and, while fighting the dogmatic immediacy of innate ideas, fell into the arms of the no less dogmatic immediacy of experience—an immediacy of experience which was valued by empiricists in proportion to its degree of immediacy and of immunity from the transforming action of the knowing subject, and was always conceived as a relation of the subject to external reality through sensation, and therefore not yet properly knowledge but mere intuition. All empiricists have been led by the logic of their philosophy to embrace intuitionism, with the exception of those who, in despair, have ended their days as phenomenalists, although even for them the phenomenon is always something immediate.[2]

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[2] Bergson's naturalistic intuitionism evidently depends on the same presupposition of dogmatic realism.

3. *Dialectic and the Overcoming of Immediacy*

Idealism cannot allow any form of intuition because it finds it impossible to suppose anything immediate in any form or stage of spiritual life. Idealism conceives of the spirit as an immanent dialectical process, alien to the lifeless mechanism of fixed things and to the immobility of mere being. The spirit is soul, life, and movement, and in its movement it realizes itself, that is, it comes to be that which it is meant to be by its essence. Whatever is spiritual is not yet, has not been born, but is to be. It is the Messiah: the time is ripe and He comes. Has a poem been written? You will not see it by turning the pages. Would you like to see the poem? Read it, study it, think; it will come. Has a good deed been done? No, good deeds are those to be done, which make us feel that whatever we have already done is not enough, that it is not the good we are longing for. The man who takes pride in what he has done (*sume superbiam quaesitam meritis*)[c] grows vain and loses his sense of the ideal, which is ideal precisely because it is never attained by what we do.

Everything in the spirit has value. And this implies that the very claim that something is already there proves that it is not. As the logicians say, its being coincides with its non-being. The problem in fact is all here, in this not-being of being, in the assertion that what we presuppose as being is not, in the affirmation which is a negation. Without this immanent and eternal negativity, we would stay with Belacqua[d] sitting on the mountain side, and we would not climb toward the summit. Without this inner refusal to be satisfied with our present being, we would neither work nor think nor sing; there would be no human life and certainly no art.

Art too, then, shares in the dialectic of the spiritual life in which it is produced. But we must point out at once that the dialectic of art is not the dialectic of thought. The meaning of the former must be carefully defined.

First we must notice that logicians have confined themselves to remarking that being is equal to non-being and is therefore becoming; but they have never troubled to explain the nature of dialectic. This may be the old static dialectic which, having set up the three concepts and analyzed them, concludes that being and non-being have the same meaning, and that therefore the truth is in their synthesis, which is becoming. But all these words mean nothing so long as the concepts are accepted as existing independently, and we are not told who equates the opposites and who identifies them in the synthesis. So long as the drama which is described does not find the actors or the protagonists to make it real in their performance it has no meaning. The true dialectic is not the one which presupposes and describes concepts, but the one which realizes them in the only place they can be realized, that is, in thought. Thus the only becoming which has a dialectical sense, as a living unity of opposites, is the becoming of the act of thinking. If we eliminate thought from our conception of the world, we will no longer find a corner of it to which the concept of becoming may apply.[3]

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[c] "Take pride in the glory won by merits." Horace, *Odes*, III, xxx, 14.

[d] Character in Dante's *Purgatorio*, IV, 123.

Now, if dialectic is the process by which thought comes to be, and if it always achieves this by negating its own being, what is its becoming? What is its being? And what is its non-being? This is a problem which has been carefully studied by recent Italian philosophy. A few brief hints will suffice here to clarify the concept which we intend to establish.

The becoming of thought, whether considered in the imperceptible instant of an act or in the rhythm of its simplest affirmations, whether considered in the history of universal civilization, as it is pictured in conceptual syntheses by the philosophy of history, or in the development of its highest speculative concepts as sketched in any history of philosophy, is always the attainment of self-consciousness: *Tantae molis erat se ipsam cognoscere mentem.*[*] It is to be conscious of the powers of the spirit, and, to this end, to experience them; to experience them in all their energy and value, as they unfold and develop ever more clearly, and to their utmost ends, the original nucleus which sustains and animates them with its native virtues. The individual man shapes himself as he shapes his personality, which grows constantly more free, because ever less confined and irrational, more universal and conformed to laws. Humanity also marches forward by making for itself a human personality, a thought ever wider and more self-conscious, shared by and valid for an ever-widening circle of men. Permeated from the beginning by its own universality, thought does nothing but gradually try and extend, rectify and solidify that universality. This is the meaning of its development. The awareness of his universality is the unvanquished faith in the powers with which man, in small and great things, advances every hour toward his goal. This is the march of thought—which is thinking. This is the march of humanity and civilization—which is the realization of self-consciousness.

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[3] See my *Riforma della dialettica hegeliana* (Messina: Principato, 1923).

[*] So great was the task of knowing one's own mind. Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 33.

4. *The Dialectic of Self-Consciousness*

But what is self-consciousness? Plainly it is neither a substance nor a mode of being. If we call it a substance, we must think of the Spinozistic substance which *is* insofar as it creates itself (*causa sui*). But Spinoza's *causa sui* is other than self-consciousness (although it is self-consciousness, too). It is an objective causality which thought thinks and cannot avoid thinking. It presupposes, therefore, the self-consciousness which is aware of it (even though Spinoza does not notice it). In other words, it is a dogmatic and pre-Cartesian causality, presupposed, not experienced, and therefore not proved. On the contrary, the causality by which self-consciousness realizes itself is the causality operating in the very act by which self-consciousness thinks itself. For to think or to assert self-consciousness is the very same self-creation of self-consciousness. It does indeed bring a substance into being, but one which exists only in the act of becoming conscious of itself. Rather than a substance, self-consciousness must be called an *act*. But, of course, it is not an act thought of or contemplated as in a mirror, but the very act of thinking, which may be called thought in action. It does not result in a static product, a sort of secondary substance, which would be the outcome of the act, for the very moment self-consciousness ceases to be a living act and subsides into a mere static existence, it is no longer self-consciousness. Its very nature is, precisely, to be incessantly active. This is proved by universal experience of spiritual life, in which no acquisition can be preserved unless it is renewed by unceasing activity. When rest comes, the rest that fools and sluggards sigh for, it is the rest of death.

How does this act of self-consciousness realize itself? Through the subject making itself its own object, that is, through a form of knowledge in which the known object is the same as the knowing subject. Such knowledge is distinguished in abstract from other kinds of knowledge, but it is implicit in all of them. For there is no knowledge without a knower consciously present as subject in the act of knowing. And every particular act of knowing, besides being the knowledge of a particular object, is self-knowledge of the knowing subject.

Self-consciousness is the result of a subject and an object in their reciprocal relation—a relation in which the subject is a subject insofar as it is also an object, and conversely. This means that the act which posits the object negates it; it negates it, that is, as the object which, in its immediacy, is opposed to the subject. If the subject remained, as such, in mere opposition to the object, it would not be the subject of self-consciousness it ought to be, for in self-consciousness subject and object are one and the same. And this holds good of the object which is posited by the very act of negating it. This indivisible unity of thesis and antithesis, of being and non-being, is the dialectic essential to self-consciousness and gives it its significance. The object opposes itself to the subject as its negation; and the subject, in its turn, is something positive only insofar as it is the negation of the object. Each of the two posits itself in opposing itself to the other, that is, in positing its opposite and in negating itself by opposition to it. The subject as pure thesis without antithesis is an abstraction; and so is the object as pure antithesis without thesis. Concrete reality is in the unity of the synthesis.

5. *The Dialectical Character of the Esthetic Form*

By thus elucidating the dialectic of self-consciousness we have also demonstrated the dialectical character of art as the subjective form of the spirit. This form would remain as something purely immediate if we could conceive the thesis as a mere positivity implying no negation. But, as we have seen, the opposite is true. The thesis is its own antithesis; affirmation is at the same time negation. The thesis is a seed which does not await favorable conditions to germinate; it is a germinating seed; if it were not, it would not be the seed it is. It is not a darkness waiting to be lighted up; it is a darkness already vanishing under the rays of the rising sun. It is not an isolated link, to which other links not yet forged will be welded; it is the first link of a complete chain, a link which cannot be taken without taking the whole chain. It is the starting point of a process not waiting to begin, but already in motion.

The dialectical character of the artistic form does not imply a dialectic which develops and completes itself within that form; rather it is one which does not allow that form to exist in abstract, but by its own innate energy forces it to come out of itself, to negate itself as a purely subjective form, and to live in the synthetic unity of itself with its own antithesis. Such an antithesis is already within the thesis which, having the innate potentiality to bring about the synthesis, cannot remain within its own subjectivity. This inner restlessness, this secret life within the very form of art, clearly has a dialectic which *contains art and is not contained by it.* For it is by virtue of this dialectic that art, the childhood of the spirit, cannot refrain from growing and gradually attaining the maturity of thought. Such dialectical movement may be compared to the life which makes the heart beat and the blood circulate, but which is not all contained by the circulatory organs or the blood and confined to them or to any other part of the living body. It circulates through the whole organism, all of it in the whole and in each single part however small.

6. *The Meaning of the Immediacy of Art*

Thus we can understand that kind of immediacy which thought ascribes to art and discern at the same time the freedom or voluntariness without which art would lose all value. The artistic form is immediate, if it is considered abstractly as the opposite of the abstract thought which is its content. In this case art is a thesis without antithesis and consequently not a synthesis. It is, therefore, not dialectical; nor, on the other hand, is it free so that a value can be attributed to it. Art is then nothing but a fact; its aspiration—the first impulse to create itself—is, also, no more than a fact, like a fall in temperature which condenses the vapor of the clouds and causes rain. The spirit, then, blows where and how it pleases; and the greatness of the artist is something superhuman or nonhuman, like some sublime natural spectacle. But as soon as this primitive, fundamental form, which is supposed to issue from the depths of human personality, has been emptied of all esthetic value, we notice the laborious effort to replace the destroyed artistic value through reflection, criticism, scholarship, technique and, in a word, thought—thought abstractly conceived, but bolstered up by a false form, in which we seek in vain that *nescio quid*[1] which moves and elevates the human soul at the sight of artistic creations.

The immediacy of art may be called, then, an abstract immediacy. But the concept of such immediacy of art is inadequate. Critical reflection on art, however, easily indulges in dwelling on it, not because reflection comes after art and takes it as its starting point, but because of the naïve realistic and naturalistic tendency which always leads thought to treat its object as something preexisting. In the present instance this tendency is encouraged by the material embodiment of the work of art, which everybody sees, or thinks he sees, before the critical reflection begins. So it happens that the critic arrives with his concepts and undertakes to analyze the work of art, like the explorer advancing in the virgin forests of unconscious nature, or like the chemist who observes in his retorts the unconscious compounding of material elements. There is the existing thing on the one side, there is thought on the other, turning its searchlight on this existing thing in order to illuminate it.

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[1] Indescribable something.

But there is another kind of immediacy which is not the abstract but the concrete immediacy—the immediacy which asserts and denies itself simultaneously, which is not a starting point where we rest, but one from which we really start, because we posited it by choosing it as the starting point from which we can reach our goal. We want the goal and we choose it. But to want and to choose in a concrete manner we must get on to the right road by choosing the right starting point. Self-consciousness, in willing itself, wills each of the two terms of the synthesis in which it consists, and wills them precisely as terms of the synthesis. It is the end result precisely because it is the starting point. And if its starting point is the immediacy that develops in the mediation of the synthesis, this mediation is, then, the life of immediacy—that life which is all in the whole organism and all in every single organ.

The concrete immediacy of the artistic form, far from excluding mediation (that is, dialectic, freedom, sprituality), is indeed inseparable from it: distinguishable but at the same time identical. What is immediate is immediate, and mediation is the development of the immediacy; but this development would be absurd if the immediate did not contain within itself its own opposite and were not animated internally by the same dialectical energy which brings about the synthesis in the fullness of self-consciousness.

This perhaps is a difficult point, especially for readers with no experience in the subtle processes of modern logic. Yet it is the result of the close arguments we have been expounding with the greatest caution. Art, in conclusion, lives with the life of the whole to which it belongs. The synthesis achieved in the process, in which art participates, works within art, transcending it or bringing about within it the germination of a broader life. The self-consciousness, to the attainment of which art contributes, is the very principle of art; it is the principle by which art not only comes into being but is the art of self-consciousness itself—this art of this self-consciousness.

Since the dialectic of art is the dialectic of self-consciousness in its self-realization, the freedom and the spirituality of the work of art are immanent in the work of art itself; but they are immanent insofar as they are also the freedom and the spirituality of self-consciousness which, with its dialectical energy—unity of affirmation and negation—is immanent both in the subject and in the object.

Thus the immediacy of our being, unreachable in its natural depth, spiritualizes itself and takes on value and comes to light; and it assumes form by negating its pure natural being,[4] and posits itself as that which, in so doing, negates itself; it posits itself together with its opposite and by the synthesis of itself with its opposite. This synthesis is present and felt from the beginning; and it acts on the immediate being from which it starts by making it simultaneously to be and not to be; it is lord and master of this immediate being which it brings to light or throws again into the night of nothingness. It works by a process which allows nothing unmediated.

Thus the same poet may be inspired and yet keep his eyes open on his feelings and on the words which his tongue is moved to utter. His thoughts always awake and self-conscious, he is ever quick to interpret his inspiration, to check, amend, and shape it, making it what it is in the synthesis of the immediate, springing from the secret depths of the subject, and that which supervenes as thought—a thought no longer subjective but rather the object of thinking, communicable by one subject to another because of its purest objectivity.

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[4] That is, the natural being which would be its own if it did not negate itself.

7. *Elucidations*

However strange these concepts may seem at first sight, they are familiar to us in the common experience of spiritual life. We learn from this daily experience that a knowing subject, only when abstractly considered, can be regarded as a product of nature, or of a process in which the subject itself had no part. But in its concreteness, that is, in that which is most subjective and personal (because most bound up with its individuality), it is its own offspring. Its natural character is *natural* only in an abstract sense. The passions, which it is led to feel by its own temperament and by which it allows itself to be governed, are only metaphorically comparable to the violence of a torrent or of some natural force. These passions can be judged because man *is not in their power* but he *gives them power over him.* One man is born with a lion's heart and another with the heart of a rabbit: and Don Abbondio[g] protests that a man without courage cannot acquire it. But Don Abbondio is Don Abbondio, and however tempted we might be to agree with him on this easy-going philosophy which reminds us of Sancho Panza, those of us who have a moral sense prefer to side with Cardinal Federigo.[h] Everyone remembers the fiery eyes of Fra Cristoforo,[i] now tamed by the remorse for his violent deeds, the firm resolve to reform, and the long discipline to which his new self had subjected his old nature. And in general, however small the effect of education, study, and reflection, conscious thought and reasoning always react to temperament and its brood of passions. They react perhaps with a fruitless censorship, with such a shaky intention to change the course of life, that they always postpone the change from one day to the other. However, there is always in man's consciousness something besides nature, something which makes nature conscious and therefore no longer nature in the abstract, that is, as an object of contemplation facing man's consciousness

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[g] A character in Manzoni's *The Betrothed.* [h] *Ibid.* [i] *Ibid.*

(man is the very conscious nature in its indivisibility), but self-consciousness and self-criticism.

What about art? Romantic doctrines, which praise the naïveté and simplicity of folk poetry as a model of art and prefer the heart and the passions to all reflection or theory of poetry, are themselves theories which propose to act, and do act, on art. Thus the nature of the preromantic Rousseau is not so naïve and immediate as to exclude all his polemical and philosophical power which made it possible for him to reach his desired goal. And what are all the sixteenth-century polemics of the unorthodox and the anti-Aristotelians, like Aretino[j] and Bruno,[k] against poetical rules and in behalf of spontaneous genius and individual character, if not a philosophical and reflective theory?

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[j] Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), Italian writer noted for his unscrupulous nature, his caustic and cynical wit, and for his libels against the potentates of his time.

[k] Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Italian philosopher and Dominican friar. He was burned at the stake in Rome for heresy.

IV

Feeling[1]

1. *The Meaning of Feeling*

This subjectivity, immediate and yet dialectical, this purely subjective form immanent in every thought and in which art consists, can only be called feeling—not in its common psychological sense (though that, too, has its value), but in the strictly philosophical sense as used in the theory of knowledge. And its meaning has to be defined and distinguished with the utmost care in order to avoid ambiguities which would degrade our doctrine to the level of the old theories of feeling, by misconstruing it and stripping it of the meaning we intend it to have.

2. *The Concept of Feeling in Greek Philosophy*

Ever since the Socratic schools, feeling has been the *crux philosophorum*. It was always regarded, however vaguely, as a sort of relation of the whole spiritual life to the subject. But down to the eighteenth century, specifically to Kant and his immediate predecessors, it was always belittled as an inferior faculty which hindered rather than aided man's progress toward his goal. When Greek philosophers after Socrates set out to write their treatises on *feeling* even those who dared to claim that the aim of life was pleasure (which is the source of all aims) did not intend to promote but rather to oppose and destroy the life of feeling. Pleasure itself was conceived by them as absence of pain rather than anything positive to be cultivated together with our rational faculties—an absence of pain which would set the mind free and allow it a quiet rational life.

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[1] For the subject matter of this chapter see also my *Introduzione alla filosofia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1933), chap. III.

It is understandable why this should have been their tendency, and why such a tendency should have been more vigorously than ever stressed in modern times in a philosophy (the philosophy of Spinoza) which, under one of its fundamental aspects, is the essence of the Greek view of life. Spinoza's *Ethics* is composed as a doctrine of freedom—a freedom to be acquired by liberating the soul from the passions. In order to free ourselves from our passions we must only know them, that is, we must discover their causes and understand their natural necessity. All this makes sense if we reflect on the thoroughly naturalistic and intellectualistic character of the Greek conception of life. In such a conception, reality was nature, the universe, existing independently of human thought which only aspired to know it, without ever attempting to transform it into a better world of its own—the moral world. Hence the essential function of the human spirit was conceived as a purely theoretical and speculative activity, without any practical power. The will (which was recognized in order to justify practical life where man exercises a causality of his own) was degraded by such a doctrine to a mere device of reason for compelling human conduct to conform to the laws of nature. Its function was therefore negative rather than positive; it was destined to put out of man's mind any foolish desire to oppose himself vainly to reality, which, being what it is, cannot be changed to please us. The ideal of this philosophy comes to be wisdom, a full understanding between the human personality, perfected by reason, and nature, which reason envisages or rather mirrors.

In such a system feeling can find no place. It is a hindrance to man who, being born to develop completely his rational nature, is from the beginning entangled in his senses, which are at once the means and the obstacle to human knowledge. He has gradually to free himself from the deceptiveness of sense-experience and rise to the level of reason. Feeling binds man to this material life of the senses which relates him to the lower animals, while reason calls him to rise above them, to overcome all the limits of material things bound up with the senses, and from the particular to climb to the universal, which is the realm of infinity and immortality. Feeling belongs to the individual man with his bodily senses; it is intrinsic in the individual and is confined within the well-marked limits of the individuality of man who has a body and therefore a sensibility. But since man possesses reason, he tends (and must tend) toward a rationality so universal as to suppress every trace of particular subjectivity. In the universality of reason there is no mine or thine, I or thou, this or that; the universal is an object of knowledge but is not the knowing subject. It has no personality, and it is not spirit.

3. *The Importance of Feeling in Christianity*

With Christianity there arises a new concept of life, no longer as nature, but as spirit, at the advent of which the old nature has to be put away. And this advent is in no way a return to a pre-existing reality, but the birth of a new reality born of good will alone. Henceforth men begin to perceive in their spiritual life something much worthier than rational knowledge and philosophical learning. They speak of the creative power of love, of faith and of hope: in short, of spiritual attitudes which cannot be the result of syllogisms and which go far beyond the possibilities of the most profound learning. However vague these concepts may be, they clearly hint at something alive and deeply rooted in the subject, that is, in man. For man feels his life, has needs and sorrows, fear of the hindrances with which his life is beset, and remorse for his sins, and anguish for his miserable state and for the death which will destroy him, as it has destroyed an infinity of other lives. These vague concepts point to something that may draw man to a life in which he can find salvation, to something that may touch his heart and drive him to seek a life which is not nature but the life of the spirit.

They point to something that seems to be a new nature, a grace, a virtue freely bestowed without his doing anything to deserve it, but which is nothing in its pure immediacy—the immediacy that deprives the spirit of all freedom and consequently of all merit, thus degrading it to the state of nature. Grace is not fate! This is the hard problem which the new age has for so long attempted to penetrate. But however mysterous it remained for a still immature reflection, men drew from it the firm assurance that the principle of salvation was within them, that it was there they must seek it, at the source of their life; there lay the treasure. The subject began to prevail over the object; the spirit, with all the strength of its inner life, began to lift itself above nature.

4. *Feeling in Modern Philosophy down to Kant*

This theological doctrine was superior to the philosophical doctrines which held the field in the patristic, scholastic, and Renaissance periods. These doctrines followed in various ways the road which had been opened and beaten by the great systems of pagan antiquity. When modern philosophy arose, from Bacon and Descartes onwards, empiricism and rationalism took up and developed in divergent directions the old naturalistic and intellectualistic motives, which had prevented the ancients from understanding feeling. Leibnizian individualism, with its concept of monad, was the first to give a glimpse of the importance of the subjectivity which is the foundation of the spirit. But Leibniz's rationalistic doctrine of clear and distinct ideas still prevented him from recognizing the value of those more obscure depths of the soul in which feeling has its roots. However, the new inquiries aroused by Leibnizian philosophy, which conceives spiritual life as a development (with highest stages based on the lower), bore fruit. For if the highest stage of thought was composed of clear and distinct ideas, its base was thronged with obscure and confused ideas. This led German philosophers, in the course of the eighteenth century, to distinguish clearly from the two classical faculties of understanding and will a third—that of feeling. Meanwhile in England, beginning with Shaftesbury, emphasis was constantly laid on the origin of moral and esthetic facts in irrational motives, which were collected into the vague class of "sentiments," always understood as original dispositions of the human spirit, derived neither from experience nor from rational principles.

Kant was to give a great importance to this category of feeling, although he opposed moral or esthetic systems founded on feeling, as being empirical, that is, given in experience. But he distinguished from the interested feelings the *disinterested*, such as the *reverence* which, according to him, men ought to have for the moral law, if this law is to acquire the power of effectively commanding obedience on their minds. An interested feeling is that which is realized in a pleasure that men naturally wish to procure or to retain, or in a pain that a no less natural tendency of our sensibility leads us to avoid or to allay. The man who acts on a sentiment of this latter kind does not act rationally; and this was exactly what the ancient thinkers had seen, who preached the necessity of freeing our minds from slavery to the passions. Disinterested feeling, on the contrary, is not experienced by a man who seeks pleasure and avoids pain, obeying his sensuous nature. It does not engage man by his individual side—his body, his senses, or any interest of his own—but it appeals to the rational man, who is concerned with the universal and is capable of delighting in something whose existence or nonexistence can neither help nor harm him. This is a profound concept, if not altogether justified. It may be amended, but not discarded as was indicated by someone who, declaring it contradictory, held that pleasure is only possible if limited to the individual. Kant is still unable to justify his disinterested pleasure, because he has not yet advanced from the psychological or empirical concept of pleasure, or of feeling in general, to the epistemological, which is its precise philosophical concept. Nor does he suspect the relation between this universal, disinterested pleasure and one of the fundamental concepts of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which perhaps his greatest discovery consists.

5. *A Criticism of the Psychological Concept of Feeling*

For psychology, feeling is a state of mind distinguished from sensation by the fact that sensation has an objective reference and feeling a subjective reference determined by the relation between a sensation and the subject having it and consequently experiencing a pleasure or a pain. Psychology formulates such a doctrine because it looks at the problem from the point of view of experience and it considers experience as an immediate or direct relation between the knower and the object known, though this object would remain precisely the same even if it were not known. To those who take this point of view feeling appears as a distinct class of conscious events which, like any other class of facts, has no necessity whatever. The facts are there, and they are what they are because experience shows them to be so. Being contingent, facts have no freedom and are outside the initiative of the subject.[2] They are given to him or imposed upon him as they are, and they become part of a *mechanism* of which the subject is the passive spectator. The sensation is determined by the stimulus, or somehow by an object; and, granted the conscious subject, the feeling is determined by the sensation.

Psychologically speaking, neither feeling nor sensation belongs to the subject; the subject merely receives them, finds them in itself without knowing how and why they got there. What psychology proposes to explain is the initiative of the subject in the act of volition which supposedly follows sensation and feeling; but it is inevitably driven to make even this volition not an act which the subject performs, rather an event which the subject observes within its consciousness (if it notices this event at all). Volition, in fact, comes to be regarded as the result of feeling, which is in its turn caused by sensation. Thus, the mechanism, creeping into consciousness through the back door of sense, establishes itself in it and becomes the lord and master. It is the mechanism of sensation that arouses feeling and through it releases the spring of the will. And the subject stands by, watching this play of foreign elements which have penetrated into its house.

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[2] See my *Teoria generale dello spirito*, pp. 163–170, where I deal with the mistake of that "philosophy of contingency" which made freedom a consequence of contingency (not a necessity of object which is a necessity of the subject).

But the game cannot last long. Psychology, in order to maintain its empirical point of view, would have to presuppose sensation and everything else (including consciousness itself!) as the conditions of consciousness. But in its attempt to allow a character of inwardness, however rudimentary, to these facts which it is supposed to describe and classify, it must suddenly patch together what it has cut in half and keep in mind that there is nothing outside consciousness, and that this boasted mechanical play of elements will not carry on without a few drops of consciousness, that is, of subjectivity or internal relation to the subject. It is agreed that sensation is the object of consciousness; but this object cannot be opposed to consciousness as something existing independently of it, as a mere fact that consciousness simply receives and acknowledges. And if between the subject and sensation there is an original and essential relation, this implies that sensation only exists as a modification of consciousness and indeed as consciousness itself.

And what about feeling? Feeling is no better able than sensation to exist independently as something of which the subject has merely to take note. If it were, how could we distinguish between the two? Feeling would be a sensation of pleasure or pain; and, conversely, could we not call the sight of a green color a pure feeling of green? Does perhaps feeling indicate some relation between experience and the subject? But if this relation were something independent of the subject, the latter would simply acknowledge it as a fact which does not concern the real subject but the subject that it becomes when affected by external experience, that is, something factitious and alien to itself. Feeling itself then must be an intrinsic part of consciousness; it must be consciousness itself, in the experience of which we realize our own being. In order for me to have a real feeling—

joy or sorrow, hope or fear—I must not confine myself to the rôle of spectator of that joy or sorrow, hope or fear; I must feel it in myself and it must be the substance of the life I am living.

But to reach this real intimacy of feeling we must escape the limitations of psychology and reverse its process.

6. *The Dialectic of Feeling*

From feeling we cannot reach the subject which feels. Feeling cannot be passed from hand to hand. But from the subject, which is conscious or, better, self-conscious, we can indeed reach feeling as well as any other concept which refers to our inner life.

But what is feeling? It is a *je ne sais quoi*, as it was once called;[a] something that everybody feels but nobody can exactly define. No one can know it without experiencing it, for it is not thought which could be defined, formulated in judgments and syllogisms, developed and enclosed in a sentence. Not only does it escape any logical definition (unless we mistake for thought those verbal definitions which fill the treatises on the psychology of feeling), but it cannot even be the subject matter of art and find its full expression in it. Consider the poet who sings his sorrow: as we know, while he sings, his sorrow is appeased and it vanishes.[b] When we read the poem we cannot say that we know the poet's sorrow, which was to have been communicated to us; instead we find ourselves in that state of grace which is the result of poetry—tranquility and joy rather than suffering. All feelings, when we speak of them, wither and fade away. Real suffering not only is unable to find words ("I did not weep, for my heart seemed turned to stone," says Count Ugolino),[c] but every joy that man wishes to preserve is jealously shut in his heart for fear that the envy of others may embitter it or the very air contaminate it.

It has been said that a feeling known is knowledge and no longer feeling; and the less it is feeling, the more it is knowledge. Thus the philosopher who ideally attains the pinnacle of knowledge is regarded as being free of all passions. But we forget that this idea of the apathetic philosopher, living in a Lucretian[d] serenity far removed from the storm of passions, is mythical and arises from an imaginary picture of the philosopher as compared to men who have not attained his philosophic consciousness. It is felt that such a philosopher, having solved many problems that trouble the human mind, is no longer bothered by the passions arising from such problems. But he has not solved all the problems. He has plenty of his own, for philosophy in its concreteness consists precisely in having such problems and, consequently, the passions connected with them. The ascetic Spinoza retired from the world and even refused a chair in philosophy for his love of independence; and throughout his *Ethics* he holds fast to the freedom he has attained, which is for him the power to look on life with the indifference of the geometer studying his lines and surfaces (*perinde ac si quaestio de lineis, planis, aut de corporibus esset*).[e] But he forgets to look into his heart; in his sublime naïveté he is unable to see the flame of passion which is consuming his thread of life. He overlooks the passion for the truth he worships not in its abstractness, but in its concrete form, in every feature and shade of color which that concrete form exhibits to his eyes (a truth concatenated throughout is structure, riveted in every joint, from the first definitions to the last *scholia*, so as to conquer every doubt, to withstand every criticism, to remain eternally unshaken and immutable, as a truth discovered, not created, by man should be—divine truth). If the philosopher really succeeded in freeing his mind from every element of passion, he would deprive himself of life; every spark would be quenched within him and the foundations of his world would crumble. The power which props and stays our mind and all that gathers and centers in our mind is nothing but feeling.

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[a] Bouhours thus described taste in his *Entretiens*.

[b] "Cantando il duol si disacerba." Cf. Wordsworth, *Prelude*, xiii, 246, and Preface to second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

[c] Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, 49.

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[d] See *De Rerum Natura*, II, 1 ff.

[e] I shall consider human actions and appetites *just as if I were considering lines, planes, or bodies. Ethica*, Preface to Part III (last line).

Feeling is, however, always dissolved in thought, which has the power of objectifying and removing from the subject what would otherwise remain an intrinsic part of it, undistinguishable from the rest of it. But if thought should ever be deprived of the feeling it thus objectifies, it would find itself struggling in the inane and would fall into nothingness.

But what the act of thought objectifies is nothing other than the subject. Feeling, then, either belongs to the subject or is the subject itself. In the former case we should have to be able to distinguish the subject from its attribute. But such a distinction is clearly impossible without thought, without the dialectical process which introduces into the abstract identity or pure being of the subject the negation or non-being, and therefore difference and distinction. In order to have any distinction we must have passed beyond the stage of pure subjectivity. To distinguish is already to think. Before thinking, that is, in the precondition of thinking which is the subject, there can be no trace of distinction. As soon as we say: "I have a feeling which I must keep (or dispel) because it is pleasant (or painful)," an activity has supervened by which the subject can envisage itself face to face as in a mirror. And in a mirror our face may please us or not; it may suggest a little touching up, a more or less naïve use of make-up or similar expedients. Naked feeling will not bear the full light of thought; and therefore we have already said that it is identical with the subject and absolutely indistinguishable from it.

The whole wealth of feelings develops through a gamut in which the distinguishing element is thought. Thought accounts for the various definite situations in which feeling shapes itself. Feeling is undifferentiated so long as it remains at the stage of the pure subject; for only by objectifying itself can this diversify itself.

Feeling in its very root is twofold: only by this twofold nature can it confer on the whole spiritual life, which depends on it, its varied color. Feeling is essentially pleasure or pain; and all the feelings, affections, passions, which we more or less distinguish in experience, are various forms of pleasure or pain. But these two feelings, or fundamental modes of feeling, in a certain sense are not really two. They are not two species each with a specific difference in addition to the generic properties they have in common. In other words they are not partly identical and partly different. One is the absolute contradiction of the other, so that we may call pleasure un-pain and pain un-pleasure. They are not two merely different or distinct things, but two contraries whose opposition to one another is contradictory. Therefore, they exclude one another absolutely, for the feeling we experience is either pleasure or pain. A state of indifference is a fiction of psychologists who have lost their way. When we can say roughly that we have neither pleasure nor pain, the truth is that we have pleasure if this indifference is easily put up with; otherwise it is boredom, which is a kind of pain and, according to Leopardi, the worst kind.

The relation between two contraries is dialectical, not in an abstract logical sense, but in a metaphysical, that is, a real and concrete sense. Their duality consists in a contrariety within a unity. It is a unity which lives, develops, comes to be, and is so far as it is not, and conversely. It posits itself as an identity of opposites. A pleasure which is stable, changeless, constant, is a dead pleasure: *Medio de fonte leporum surgit amari aliquid.*[4] Its very life consists in continually arising out of its contrary. Consequently from Epicurus to Kant those who have examined this dialectic of feeling most closely have defined pleasure as the cessation of pain.[3] On the other hand pain announces a lack, a loss of something positive. It is a sorrow for Francesca to recall

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[3] The clearest, most profound and effective proof is given by Pietro Verri in his *Discorso sul piacere* (1736).

[4] "Something bitter springs from amidst the very source of delight." Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, IV, 1127. Cf. "In the very temple of delight Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine." Keats, *Ode on Melancholy*.

"happier things,"[g] and the crowding thought of "days that are no more" are a pain to Ermengarde[h] when she has lost all hope. Thus pain in its turn may be defined as the cessation of pleasure. The truth is that in their opposition to one another they are both abstract. The man who expects life to be a cup overflowing with nectar and the man who complains that it is a bitter cup of wormwood are alike fooled by these abstractions. Optimism and pessimism are two false philosophies because it is on these abstractions that they are founded.

Like every instance of being and non-being, pleasure and pain have their concrete reality in their becoming—in a negation which is not static but dialectic,[4] and which is the concrete actuality of two abstract positions. Their abstractness cannot be overcome merely by mixing together the elements which previously were separated, and keeping before our minds the resulting whole as we previously did the parts. Two contraries are not parts which can be united; they are contraries just because one devours the other. Their union is a dynamic unity which in its process gathers up and resolves the contraries in itself. Where is this dynamism?

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[4] There is someone who speaks of dialectic and the unity of opposites, but is unable to conceive of a unity which is not static. Such a unity is the strong point of the author [Croce] of a brilliant and popular essay published in Italy under the rather pretentious title of *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto nella filosofia di Hegel* (Bari: 1908). This essay bore obvious traces of the immaturity natural to a first attempt to master Hegel's thought. The author is mistaken both in the part of Hegel's thought which he calls living and the part which he calls dead. But there is here and there a spark which illuminates the profound truth of some of Hegel's concepts. These concepts are seen by the author only vaguely and distantly, for he lacks the serious and adequate historical preparation necessary for understanding a philosophy like that of Hegel, whose roots go so deep into the historical development of philosophical thought. Only such a preparation can reveal the significance which certain problems gradually acquired in the course of that development, and the importance they came to have. But our author shows that he has let this importance and this significance quite escape him by coming out with his ingenious gibe of "theologizing philosophy"—surely one of the most naïve philosophical weapons ever used by philosophers (though they have a weakness for odd paradoxes) against philosophy!

[g] Dante, *Inferno*, V, 122.

[h] A character in Manzoni's tragedy *Adelchi*.

7. *Pleasure and Pain*

This dynamism, as we know, is in thought, and therefore in the synthesis of subject and object, that is, in the subject itself; for, as we have seen, the very dialectic, peculiar to the synthesis, is immanent in the subject. Not only is the positive activity immanent in the subject, but also the negative activity, since both together constitute the one eternal activity which is the dialectical self-creation of the spirit. We know from experience (in which the life of the spirit, mysterous in its origins, seems to come into full light) that what we feel as a pleasure is our own being, living as consciousness of its own life; thus we are pleased by whatever in our inward life seems to promote and stimulate it, and we are displeased by whatever seems to hinder and depress it. Consequently, as man gradually develops his life and his world, and within that world his own being (all of which implies the protection and extension of new acquisitions, the satisfaction of needs, and in general the preservation of all the conditions contributing to the realization of his life), whenever the conditions for his development fail him (a person he loves is lost, a need cannot be satisfied, something acquired is taken away, and the world in which he has arranged his life crumbles) his heart is broken, his life is thwarted. This is for him pain. And the greatest pain, as pictured by our horrified imagination, is the one which represents the final defeat of life—death. Death in fact is thought of as the negation of life (which is consciousness), as the eclipse of that kindly sun which physically keeps us alive and lights up the horizon around us and everything therein. Death is therefore the greatest of all pains, and life the greatest of all pleasures; life is pleasure, the whole of pleasure, and nothing but pleasure.

This conclusion is not contradicted by the experience of abnormal tendencies by which man seeks and desires his own destruction, and delights in pleasures that shorten his life. We have explicitly noticed that the life with which pleasure is to be identified is not the physiological life as understood by science, but the life which unfolds on the stage of consciousness and is consciousness itself. This life fashions its own ideal and may see death where the physiologist sees life, and conversely.

Living is thinking. And if the ancients believed that we should *vitam extendere factis*,[1] we express the same idea by saying rather that we should *vitam extendere cogitationibus*. For the deeds we happen to do cannot fill or extend our life unless we think them. The warning of Campanella was "Think, man, think." And to think is more than to feel.

But who does the thinking? There is thought wherever a man thinks; and man is not a head but an ego, an individual, who may perhaps have no tongue to tell his thoughts, but yet may be there, himself, as the thinking subject. He may be a great man simply as a mere subject of thought, and may become more or less great as his thought develops, since everything he produces adds to his credit; or he may be a little man, a mere child. But if he is not there, alive, as he must be if he is there at all, there is no more to be said about his thought; his life will be a sham. Now this *being there*, this *existing* of that which creates its own existence and its own thought, which creates itself and its ideas, is what we call a subject, a living being whose life develops itself in thought. Its life is feeling, and feeling is not immediately given or natural but is dialectical. It finds its satisfaction not in what it is nor in what it is not (which is the same thing), but in what it becomes. If this feeling could be a mere being, it would be a stable pleasure not born to die. If, on the other hand, it were pure non-being, it would similarly be a changeless pain lying on our hearts like a stone. But being and non-being are identical; the very nature of being is to negate itself: which is to say that enjoyment implies suffering, because we must achieve it for ourselves. The pleasure which is real is not that abstract pleasure which precedes pain, but the concrete pleasure which includes pain, and never fails to do so.

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[1] Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, X, 467: "*Breve et irreparabile tempus omnibus est vitae: sed famam extendere factis, hoc virtutis opus*" (the life of man has short and irrevocable bounds; only the deeds of virtue can stretch the narrow span).

It never fails to do so because the fire of feeling (of its being and non-being) is proved in thought, that is, in the act by which the feeling subject thinks in order to apprehend itself and realize itself as self-consciousness. He who thinks must be, otherwise he could not think. And since thinking or the acquisition of self-consciousness is the demonstration, the very proof, of our existence, can we be conscious of ourselves as pain? This would amount to convincing ourselves that, since we think, we do not exist (which is exactly the opposite of the Cartesian *Cogito*). The facts proclaim just the contrary; they show that whenever a man thinks (even in the abstract stage which he has already overcome) about his own non-being or pain, he nevertheless finds pleasure in the very act of thinking. Hence arises the well-known paradox of human greatness achieved by the consciousness of human misery, the greatness which makes giants of Pascal and Leopardi. It is a contradiction to say with Scipio Nascia *domi non esse* (I am not at home).[5] We must be there in order to think. The great works which have celebrated personal or human misery are at the same time great assertions of the vigorous existence of the subject concerned, of that existence which is the eternal source of the joy of life and which ever rises victorious from its own negations, while the abstract spirit abnegates its life in impotent lament and idleness.

8. *Feeling and Kant's Transcendental Ego*

This pleasure, which is not a state of being but the living principle of life of the spirit and therefore of all that is; this mighty being, which is only relatively immediate and natural, but absolutely dialectical and dynamic, and therefore free and active, is feeling—the creative center of all things.

Two historical references may throw light on this concept.

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[5] Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, lxviii, 276.

The first is the transcendental ego or original perception of Kant. This is not identical though it is analogous with the concept of feeling or the subjective aspect of the spirit as we have described it. It is not identical because, Kant not having yet arrived at the concept of dialectic, the Kantian ego is merely given; it does not construct itself but is immediate perception of itself, self-consciousness. It is the presupposition and *a priori* condition of every judgment and every thought; and, like the rest of Kant's *a priori* forms of the spirit, it is not a process but something ready-made, which stands there to make thought possible. Thought finds this pure ego at the starting point of its process and looks no further. It does not inquire about how it happened to be there. Kant never deduces any of the transcendental forms of the spirit in his system; he finds them. The whole *Critique of Pure Reason* is an inventory.

For us the subject or feeling is not self-consciousness or transcendental unity of consciousness, but the principle from which consciousness originates in its dialectical process. The ego is thought; the transcendental ego is pure or transcendental thought; but feeling—the subject—is not thought; it is the condition of transcendental thought itself. On the other hand, the limits of the transcendental change as a result of the profound modification of the concept of experience to which these limits apply. For Kant experience is a sort of relation between the inward spirit and the outside world from which the spirit receives the data of the sensible manifold; it is the result of an interaction between the activity and the passivity or receptivity of the spirit. Without this passive or receptive element, which suggests an external stimulus, there would be no experience but only construction *a priori*. But, for us, every distinction between inner and outer, between activity and passivity of the spirit, is out of place. The spirit is pure activity and receives nothing from the outside. Like the Leibnizian monad, it has no windows. But if Leibniz's monad might be said to need at least a loophole to get a glimpse outside itself at the monad of monads, ours has no such need, for, being no longer finite, nothing can be thought outside it. Consequently, for us experience is a relation of the subject, not with something outside itself but with itself. Nor do we any longer need within us a passive and an active term, in order to make experience possible. The object itself, or content of knowledge, is the manifestation in act of the creative power of the subject, which brings itself into being by bringing the object into being. Both correlatives are born together in the living act of thought. Thought may properly be called experience, since the spirit experiences (*experitur*) itself in the act of thinking, that is, actualizes itself, and so tests its own potentiality, which cannot remain a mere hypothesis but must be realized. But the touchstone of experience in this sense will no longer be the given fact, which limits experience; it will be within the whole of experience itself. Kant himself saw that the measure of experience can only be experience itself.[6]

But into experience thus understood there evidently enters not only the product of that secondary activity (which, according to Kant, presupposes the system of *a priori* forms of the spirit), but also the process of that primary activity which constructs those forms. All these forms, if considered from outside, that is, outside their actuality, have their growth in time as forms of experience in the Kantian sense; but if they are regarded from within the very act of their self-production, as they live in thought, their growth is not in time but in the timelessness which belongs to spiritual life. This observation must be emphasized, though we know *a priori* that it will not influence the glib and popular philosophers of fine literature. They will go on drearily (with the infinite dreariness of antitheological philosophers!) distinguishing and actually separating the temporary from the eternal, and pure from empirical thought. If they do not turn their backs altogether on philosophy as mere methodology and embrace the crude facts of history and of experience crudely conceived, they try to operate among the shadows of a dim and bottomless abyss where air is lacking and life is impossible.

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[6] For this concept of experience see my lecture "L'esperienza pura e la realtà storica" (1914), reprinted in the 2nd edition of *La riforma della dialettica hegeliana* (Messina: Principato, 1923), pp. 249 ff.

This will not do. Thought is all empirical and all pure. As empirical, it seems to be all in time; but when its empirical character is strictly understood according to the concept of experience which we have explained, time reveals itself for what it is—not something in which thought occurs, but something which occurs in thought and in all thought. Thought, then, is not in time. But in order to understand correctly this thought or experience, the first condition is to look for it where it is, namely, in its actuality. There we find no error but only truth; not the sort of truth which can be called false or true up to a point or for a time, but the truth of the very act in which truth consists. And such truth is eternal. All thought is eternal because it is all pure relatively to the Kantian experience. We must begin with self-consciousness, with the ego, we must begin and end there, for all thought is self-consciousness; it is the distinction of the object in which the subject acquires consciousness of itself or progressively distinguishes itself as self-consciousness.[7]

If thought or experience is understood thus in the strictest sense, then the transcendental element which is immanent in experience and yet transcends it (which is the transcendental in the Kantian sense) will no longer be the *a priori* condition of which Kant was thinking nor the condition of experience in the narrow sense, but the condition of all experience, of all thought. And if all thought can be nothing but the ego in its development, then the transcendental element is nothing but the subject which is the *a priori* condition of the ego.

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[7] Again I remind any reader who may not yet have understood me, that, when I speak of absolute truth from the point of view of "actual idealism," I certainly do not mean to deny that even truth has its history and therefore changes and develops. I only mean that nevertheless every assertion presents itself as endowed with absolute value. The point of view may change; but, given the point of view, the truth is what it is and cannot be otherwise. No doubt we foresee that the point of view of any given assertion is not absolute. But we must remember that the assertion which strictly speaking is actively present is not then that whose truth-value we assert to be limited but that by which we assert its limitations. What is clear is that, so far as we think at all, we think absolute truth and nothing else.

9. *Comparison with Rosmini's Fundamental Feeling*

Even more interesting for us may be a comparison with Rosmini's *fundamental feeling*, which is to be placed on the same level as Kant's *transcendental.*

As we have already had occasion to notice,[8] Rosmini designates by this term the sense which a given subject has of its body, whose modifications are therefore mirrored in modifications of the fundamental feeling and give rise to the particular sensations. This feeling, too, is inactual as a mere fundamental feeling, since we never feel our body unless it is affected somehow by constant changes in internal and external conditions. Thus what we feel is not a general vague feeling whose particular manifestations result in the sensation, but simply this or that particular sensation. But there is another and stronger reason why it is inactual and therefore transcendental. For not even the sensation, as such, is actual; it is only found as an element in *intellectual perception*, which is the innermost core of experience, beyond which there is no light and no consciousness. To be aware of anything we must begin with intellectual perception. And this requires something more than sensation; it requires a certain intellectual light, which is the idea of existence. This idea must be possessed by the intellect and used by the spirit as a *primitive synthetic unity* of sense and intellect to assert the existence of the sensation. It makes the sensation the subject of judgment, which in experience always has the idea of being as its predicate. For whatever we think, and however we think it, *is* (and is existence). If the subject were only fundamental feeling it would be feeling; and, as this feeling, it would remain bound up with the world of existence, but it could never know that world and would have no means of raising itself above that world by thought. Consequently, for Rosmini the subject is the unity of feeling and intellect.

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[8] Introduction, chap. III, § 6.

At any rate, without this feeling, the subject, as pure intellect, would float in the world of possibility, that is, in the world of abstract thought, which may be perfect and free of contradiction and yet bear no resemblance to anything real. It would remain suspended in the air with no power of coming to the solid earth. Not everything that is thinkable has the consistency of the real and the certain. To have this it must pass through the subject, where it meets the criterion of certainty and uncertainty that distinguishes what is thought of but may not exist, from what is thought of and does exist.

In this doctrine of fundamental feeling we recognize the Cartesian problem of certainty and the Kantian problem of a knowledge limited to the object of experience and unable to rise to the sphere of the supersensible. This problem, so recurrent in modern philosophy,[9] leads Rosmini also to look for a solution in the subject, which is no longer satisfied with mere truth but wants the certainty of truth. As for the intellect, Rosmini still thinks it necessary and possible to find the basis of truth outside the subject; in fact he places the idea of existence outside the mind and makes its intuition the form of the human intellect. It is not from within itself that the human intellect derives this illuminating idea, which will shed its light on all thought and so on all reality. But for Rosmini an intellect of this nature is powerless to penetrate the solid reality which it is supposed to illuminate. It could not even get in touch with such reality; in order to do so the intellect would have to be fused in the subject into a single unity with feeling, which is exclusively subjective. Feeling belongs to the subject, which is a particular soul just so far as it is also a definite body, a subject enclosed within its own private individuality. For the body is unquestionably particular, and it shapes the fundamental feeling of which it is the content. It is this feeling which enables the subject to grasp reality and in so doing become aware of itself. The body certainly is felt; it is the *objectum mentis*, as Spinoza calls it, of that mind which, belonging to the indefinite attribute of the *res cogitans*, can never pass over into the *res extensa*. The body is within the mind, if considered from the point of view of the subject, which is the only point of view allowed to those who wish to understand the process of consciousness. Is there any other body, with which thought could somehow be linked and of which it would be possible to speak with full awareness?

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[9] On the problem of certainty in modern philosophy see my *Studi vichiani* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1927), p. 40.

This then, according to Rosmini, is the point at which thought inserts itself into reality; not into material reality, but into the reality which materialists take to be material and which is simply the reality that thought constantly needs in order to find itself. This is the root by which the vast tree of thought, whose top reaches heaven, is firmly planted into the earth. It is from the earth that it draws its life, it is there it finds the source of its existence, from which it can grow high and spread its lofty branches to the firmament. To uproot it from this earth would be to fell it, to dry up its vital sap and quench the life which raises it ever higher. This root the subject can never beg or borrow. It is its attributes, the presupposition of every event in which it considers itself as spectator or creator. It is its starting point; and for man, who receives from it his vital impulse, it is the starting point of everything.

This feeling then is at the root of all spiritual life; it is the very origin of any form of knowledge, the center of the human personality—the center around which the whole existing world of that personality revolves. Clearly it bears a strong resemblance to the fundamental feeling of which we spoke above. For Rosmini, there is no intellectual perception and no knowledge of any kind which is not animated by the fundamental feeling. Therefore, every idea is a man's idea and is bound up with his being and pulsing with the inner movement which constantly generates, within his consciousness, his own life and that of the universe to which his life is united. And for us, similarly, there is no thought which is not the act of some subject, colored by the latter's subjective nature, and directed by its interest, because inseparably connected with his life and being. And nothing is indifferent to a man who lives keenly and vividly in his own thought, who feels his life developing in the course of that thought, and therefore never forgets that, in everything he thinks, his personality is at stake: *res sua agitur*. For him everything shares in the inward joy with which he triumphs over the darkness of his own non-being and wins the light. He wins the light by the energy that will sustain him in all his life.

10. *Comparison with Gioberti's Concept of Existence*

In connection with our discussion of Rosmini, it is relevant to mention Vincenzo Gioberti's ideas on the matter. Gioberti was unable to persuade himself that the being which is the object of intellectual intuition can be merely possible or ideal. He observed that if the being, which is the common predicate of all possible objects and almost their intellectual common denominator, were ideal, these objects would turn out to be equally ideal, and the real would evaporate into mere abstract possibility. Why should the being intuited by the human intellect be ideal? According to Rosmini, simply because it is intuited through a relationship which does not allow the subject to reach the reality of the universal Being. This, in being intuited, necessarily conforms itself to the nature of the intuiting subject, which acquires only the idea of it. Gioberti vehemently protested against this psychological argument as leading to subjectivism, skepticism, and nihilism. He set against it his ontological interpretation which refuses to distinguish between reality and the idea of reality, but identifies the two terms, and boldly ascribes to the human intellect the intuition of the supreme divine reality. Thus the human intellect, in knowing particular things, no longer attributes them to a merely ideal being, but traces them back directly to God, not to identify them with God but to point out in them, now made intelligible, the creative action of God. It is clear then that all things are not merely possible but real; they are real because God is real, on whom they depend as effects proving the creative activity of their cause. Cause and effects, creator and creatures, form together a system in which all is real with the reality of the creator in whom the creatures have their origin. And in his reality as creator of his creatures, God is present to the intellect whose immanent intuition illuminates the world and makes all knowledge possible. There is no danger of pantheism as Rosmini feared: the creatures remain mere creatures and presuppose a creator. And the sum of capital truths is not an idea but a judgment or rather a living process.

It looks as if the center of thought were shifted and were returning from the certainty of the moderns to the objective truth of Platonic philosophy. It looked so to Gioberti at first. He was quick to notice that his celebrated ideal formula as at first defined (*Being creates Existence*) was defective and required the completion of the circle (*Existence returns to Being*), as he put it. This return can be accomplished because existence is spirit or subject, which, as our philosopher boldly says, is created, indeed, but repays its creator in full by recreating him in the process of thinking and therefore knowing him. The existent emerges again, but in the guise of the subject, which must find its origin in its Creator, provided that this Creator is created by the subject itself. In short, without the subject, on which Being reflects itself and thus returns to itself as self-consciousness, Being would never be more than a presupposition, a mere possibility, as Rosmini suspected. Its realization is achieved through the existent, so far as that existent is a subject. But if this Being, which makes everything thinkable, is a Being which knows itself and actualizes itself through the existent which is the subject of knowledge, we find once more that the subject contains not only the source of all certainty, both concerning particular things and concerning God, but contains also the source of all reality. By breaking this link the whole chain which holds up the world will be loosened, letting it fall into chaos.

V

Love and Speech

1. *Art Is Not the Expression of Feeling but Feeling Itself*

In the light of the results of our inquiry, art is not, as someone called it, the *expression* or intuition of *feeling*, but *feeling* itself. The well-known doctrine which defined art as *expression of feeling* struggled long and vainly to produce a theory by which art should be distinguished from philosophy and yet share with it in the essence of the theoretic spirit. But it never succeeded. While aiming at constructing an esthetics of form, it ended by constructing the very esthetics of content which it meant to replace. It began with distinguishing the theoretical activity of art from the theoretical activity of philosophy on the basis of their different content—the particular in the case of art, the universal in the case of philosophy. It ends with differentiating the intuitive form of knowledge, supposed to be peculiar to art, by allotting it a special content, namely, feeling, from which the *lyrical character* of art could be derived. But such a difference of content cannot be resolved into a difference of form. For the author[a] of this doctrine gave to feeling an existence of its own, independent of its function as the content of art. Feeling was for him, in its vagueness, that practical activity of the spirit which is as real as its theoretical activity. Thus, art came to be conceived dualistically. It was verbally defined as a synthesis, but it was impossible to see the

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[a] Croce.

a priori generative principle of such a synthesis. The synthesis remained a mere result of adding the form of intuition to feeling. First there is feeling and then the intuition of this feeling; as if such an immediate intuition or any spiritual activity directed upon an object already existent were possible! For instance, in one of the many expositions of the esthetics alluded to we read as follows: "Art is nothing but *imagination*, and what is called *beauty* is nothing but the self-enjoyment of imagination, the value of imagination. And since imagination, fertile imagination, can only arise from our feelings (aspirations, tendencies, revolts, loves, hates, and the like), art may be defined as the theoretical form of feeling. In imagination the feelings become images, life becomes contemplation, and the passionate impulses, which in themselves are dumb, become expressions. In short, all acquire awareness, not yet logical and historical awareness, but the immediate and unreflective awareness of *intuition*."[1] Here evidently the form is one thing and the content another; and it is said that the content must be absorbed into the form; however, the conversion of the content into the form is nothing but a mere addition of one to the other. In another passage[2] the author speaks of "living concrete unity" and of an "*a priori* esthetic synthesis" and repeats once more that "feeling without (intuitive) imagination is blind and the image without feeling is empty." He asserts that the only *artistic* fact is the relation between feeling and intuition. But, though we see feeling and we see intuition, the author fails to show us the *tertium quid* which is their relation. He condemns as pettifogging the criticism that this esthetics of intuition "by designating feeling or states of mind as the content of art considers such a content outside the intuition, and seems to recognize that a content which is not a state of mind or feeling does not lend itself to artistic treatment and is not a subject for art." And he calls it pettifogging because "feeling or a state of mind is not a particular kind of content but the whole universe seen in the form of intuition (*sub specie*

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[1] Croce, *Conversazioni critiche*, I, 81.

[2] *Breviario di estetica* (Bari: 1913), p. 52.

intuitionis). And outside it no content is conceivable, except one that had also a form other than the form of intuition; certainly not thoughts, which are the whole universe seen in the form of knowledge (*sub specie cogitationis*); not physical things or mathematical entities, which are the whole universe seen in the form of abstract schematism (*sub specie schematismi et abstractionis*); not acts of the will, which are the whole universe seen in the form of will (*sub specie volitionis*)."[3]

Too many Latin formulas! They remind us of Don Abbondio who, in order to avoid the insistent questions of poor Renzo,[b] brings out in a like manner his tags of Latin. But whatever the appropriateness of the formulas may be, the sophistry of the answers is evident. For the sophistry here is not in the criticism of the theory, but in the theory itself. Would it not be begging the question or arguing pointlessly to prove that feeling is not a particular content (alongside of which there may be others less susceptible of artistic treatment), by pointing out that such a feeling is the whole universe seen *sub specie intuitionis?* The argument amounts only to this: there is no other content which lends itself as well as does feeling to artistic elaboration: or, in other words: feeling is the artistic content, and the others are not artistic. But every other content, we were told, must have a form other than the form of intuition. And we agree on that. But feeling itself is practical activity and so already has its own form, other than the intuitive; all this, however, according to the author, does not prevent such a form from being converted into the intuitive form. And when we object that feeling is a particular kind of content, already held as peculiarly apt and fitted for artistic treatment, we do not speak of feeling already transformed into imagery, but of feeling as mere material for art, that is, of that feeling which our author accepts for his artistic synthesis, while rejecting from that synthesis thought and physical things (in whatever way these last are understood).

To avoid the objection he would have to give an answer which he cannot give. He would have to be able to say that all possible contents are feeling and that no other can be conceived. Such a reply would be absurd; for if we could believe this and if it were true, feeling would be nothing in particular or definite. *Omnis determinatio negatio.* In order for feeling to be what it is, it must distinguish itself from what is not feeling.

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[3] *Breviario di estetica*, pp. 53–54.

[b] Leading character in Manzoni's *The Betrothed.*

In this case we must take a different point of view and identify content with form, and make the esthetic form consist in feeling, returning with the utmost strictness to De Sanctis' idea that the content *disappears* in the artistic form. This is not a mysterious synthesis like that of Kant, which, if it were to be thought out clearly to the end, would have to outgrow the duality of its opposite terms and rediscover the unity which by its dialectical process generates the opposites. And esthetics now has to accomplish the same task; no more passive feeling on the one hand and active intuition on the other: these must be replaced by that spiritual intuition or immediacy (animated by the freedom of a dialectical movement) which is the pure activity of feeling as such—the feeling which is silent and blind in its immediacy, but eloquent and luminous insofar as it shares in the dialectical life of the spirit.

2. *Feeling as the Unity and Infinity of the Work of Art*

When feeling is expressed, its actual expression is no longer feeling but thought—history, philosophy. It is thought as the synthesis of subject and object, or that complete life of the subject when it becomes self-conscious and so makes itself both subject and object in their unity. This synthesis is history so long as thought, or the concept of philosophy, remains rooted in the existent through feeling. Our world in the primary depths of its subjectivity is one; distinction arises within it through expression, which is thought, and which fixes both subject and object as distinct, by projecting the subject outside itself and so differentiating its original unity. The analysis is never without the correlative synthesis; the analysis is synthesis.

Distinctions increase and multiply but always as distinctions within the unity. Whenever the unity of the synthesis is broken, thought loses itself in difficulties, which are overcome as soon as we regain the unity shining through the veil of multiplicity. Through the many facets of the prism of thought, feeling itself, which animates and supports thought, breaks out in many colors. From the one feeling it is, it takes on various forms and features by its embodiment in thought in which it is summoned by its own essence to actualize itself. There are as many feelings as there are thoughts; each is infinite and incomparable with any other, because it contains the whole subject, which is one and infinite. Every feeling is a world in itself; together with thought, to which it gives life, it forms one individual in its wholeness—an individual in the proper sense of the word, not as an attribute or an object of the self-consciousness in which personality is realized, but as self-consciousness itself.

What is called a work of art (poem, symphony, picture, statue), just so far as it is a work of art, is self-contained, and unlike any other. For its artistic character is to be found in the feeling that animates it, in the soul that sustains it and makes us feel it as something alive, stirring our heart with the hidden passion which is the source of our life. This feeling, which underlies every distinction, is undistinguishably one, with no parts. Yet at the same time it is the whole. Nothing is outside it, and everything that comes to light in the life of the spirit must be born of it.

Works of art, which are many indeed, can be put together and considered from a general but completely extrinsic point of view. However, when we approach them and look at them closely one by one, each becomes like a tree that prevents us from seeing the forest. Within each of them there is a world in which the spirit expatiates without ever reaching boundaries that it can cross or whence it can see another land. When we are reading the *Divine Comedy* and are immersed in the depths of its vision, there is no Laura or Angelica or Ophelia or Margaret; just as outside thought there is no other thought nor anything else. Is all thought, then, in the *Comedy?* No, not if you abstract from the personality, which has set its seal on the work and concentrates it in its soul, or rather in the feeling which is the soul of its soul. But then we excavate from the poem its abstract content, a thought which is the subject matter of thinking (dead thought, abstract logos); and this thought is summed up as a part of a wider thought, which may be the history of manners, of political theory, of poetic doctrines, of philosophical and religious thought and so on. Unfortunately, in all this history, the unique individuality of Dante with his personal accent, his passion, his mood is overlaid. The poem is infinite in that life of perfectly individual feeling which pulses within it and makes it resound with a peculiar tone in the heart of every man who is capable of reading the poem.

3. *The Nature of Infinite Feeling*

But clearly the infinity of feeling which is mirrored in every work of art would be a merely hypothetical and nonexistent infinity if it confined itself to concentrating the whole into the soul of a particular individual. Infinity is not the characteristic of Dante's soul as an individual, for its individuality is indissolubly connected with a material body and chained to the body's destiny. The material body decays and ceases to be; and the soul, which must feel in order to have understanding, and can only feel through the body, does it perish too, as Pietro Pomponazzi feared? And what sort of infinity would that be which was destined to collapse with the mortal personality? Illusory? It would be better to call it nonexistent, since an infinity that comes to an end is not infinite.

But the work of art, like everything spiritual, must be of infinite and therefore of immortal worth. So its infinity, which is the infinity of feeling, cannot be an illusion, like that of a man who dreams that he is master of the world and wakes to find himself in a garret or with his feet in the stocks. Infinity belongs to the subject just because it is the subject; and to be a subject is to feel the body, but the body which, as we noticed, is not that bit of body, never very large, called the physical body of

John Doe, but the whole universe. And the subject, previous to all thought and all contradiction and distinction and difference, is the subject of me, but of a me which, once born, does not scatter and divide itself. It always remains whole in its infinity—an infinity which contains all differences, including that by which I distinguish myself from you and from others. If it is true that all multiplicity and finitude come out of feeling, so long as we remain within feeling by considering the work of art as a work of art, we cannot imagine a multitude of infinities, each self-contained though coexisting with the others like Leibniz's monads. Infinity is one. There are not men, but there is Man. *Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*,[c] we may say to the poet, for, if he really weeps because he is deeply and sincerely moved, his tears are no longer those of a particular man. They are his and mine, too, because they are every man's, not those of any one man but of Man. The artist's humanity, his universality, and hence his immortality, all flow from the same source as his art—from feeling. This feeling, which must and always does manifest itself, has made itself a home in each of us, and from the furthest times and places it calls us, gathers us, presses us into a single life, and, by inflaming our hearts with a single passion, it teaches us that though we have different bodies we have one soul.

4. *Love*

Love, this vehement and mighty force which seems to spring from the womb of nature and to carry all away with the devastating fury of a hurricane, and which yet can be tamed and disciplined and ennobled by reflection and will and sublimated to a spiritual ideal, must be brought down from the heights where men have set it to the roots of the life of the spirit. The close relationship between love and art—the creator of beauty—has often been suspected by philosophers. In the Platonic school of Alexandria and during the Renaissance this relationship was one of the most fruitful subjects for esthetic and metaphysical speculation. No idea or truth or thought inspires our souls with such longing, or shines with such splendor as beauty. Beauty, which wakens man to love, is at the starting point from where the spirit is impelled toward truth and thought, or toward the ideas by which thought pictures truth. The spirit eagerly longs for beauty and is never weary of it, for beauty is essential to the nature of the spirit and cannot be omitted. Beauty shines in the depths of the spirit, where, while ever maintaining that primal unity that lies in the hearts of all of us, at the very roots of our life, it germinates and propagates in an infinite variety of forms.

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[c] Horace, *Ars poetica*, 102: "If you want me to weep you must yourself first grieve."

Thought is the only sky above men; those who are dead lived under it in their days, when they too lifted their eyes to heaven; those yet unborn will live under it, when they too shall open their eyes and hearts to the sublime wonders of the starry vault. But, although gathered under it, with the same spectacle in front of our eyes, we would not love one another if we did not meet one another's eyes, if we did not clasp one another's hands, and if each man's heart did not find the way to unite itself to others and to intertwine those threads by which our roots branch out and cling deep into the earth. For we are all planted in one earth; but the sky, with its beauty and sublimity, is so far, so high above us! These hidden roots which meet and mingle in an invisible network are our souls with their highest thoughts. Our souls as such, like feeling, naturally understand one another at a glance, because they find themselves all, in one single feeling, one single soul. Yet this one identical soul is also differentiated. The love of the sexes, where this melting fire burns most intensely, fusing two souls into one, is all the more ardent because in the very heart of this unified and identical feeling there dwells an irreducible difference. This difference can give rise to the strongest feeling of repulsion (one subject against the other) unless the two souls involved succeed in resolving the duality. And the duality so often fails to be resolved, not because of difference of feeling, which, as we have seen, is impossible, but because of the difference of the personalities in which the feeling is incorporated. Yet the love of the sexes can also generate the most powerful mutual attraction and the swiftest and most complete unity, whenever minor differences drop out of sight and two souls meet face to face in the feeling of their fundamental unity.

But still a difference must persist. Without it love would fall to the level of a natural instinct, and of that immediacy in which there is no place for anything spiritual, not even for feeling. The feeling which binds one person to another, or even to a thing, is not a feeling which already exists, but one which comes to be through the dialectical energy of the spirit. The immediate opposition of two persons to each other gives rise to two feelings, each the negation of the other. And each person must naturally be opposed to any other; for they are two infinities, each of which excludes the other and so tries to establish a preponderance over it. If this stage of negation is to be overcome and the two feelings are to affirm and confirm one another by merging into a single feeling, it is necessary to establish a process which eliminates separation. This process begins to be realized in the soul of the single subject, and it continues to be realized in its relations with other souls, not because these relations may take the subject outside itself, but because all relations between individuals are always new problems in the individual's inner life. He must overcome his own non-being in order to attain his own being and to build up his existence.

5. *The History of Feeling*

It must be understood that, in this process, feeling does not develop by a dialectic confined within the limits of pure subjectivity, which, in its abstract form, would remain eternally changeless. Feeling in fact is unchanging apart from the dialectic of the total rhythm of the spirit in the actuality of self-consciousness, which is thought. The lack of activity of the spirit (which is never absolute rest) can produce natural sympathies and antipathies, but not real love or hatred. There will be a sort of feeling which the subject discovers in itself, but with which it feels so little relationship that it comes to put up with it as a state of mind from which it suffers at not being able to free itself.

The history of feeling is the history of the whole spirit, for the operations of the spirit encompass the whole spiritual personality and assimilate feeling to the developing life of the whole. In taking on these various guises, feeling may appear under diverse and contradictory forms, which cause conflicts and dissensions between one man and another, between men and things, between man and his self. These conflicts and dissensions are born in the history of the spirit and in that history find their reconciliation. They find it when thought confers, or rather restores, to the subject, that is, to feeling, the universality which was the latter's birthright.

Such universality has often been allowed to the theoretic spirit and denied to the practical. The latter has been considered as entangled in the net of particular relations, in which the agent has to act and to remain until able to rise to the universality of the theoretic spirit. For, the theoretic spirit, both in art and philosophy, is never a subject limited by particular circumstances, nor does it act on objects defined in space and time, but it is the universal man in whom all men are one. But where the spirit is, there is universality. If we look at the form, action is just as universal as art and philosophy; if we look at the content, not only action but art and philosophy as well individualize themselves and divest themselves of their incontestable universality.

The particular emerges in the spirit when the spirit has not yet acquired its form; it subsists because thought has not yet attained the self-consciousness in which the object is equated with the subject, or rather, thought has not yet attained the universality that befits a subject which by thinking must seek and find itself in the object. But thought never attains the absolutely perfect adequacy of object to subject. If it ever did, as we know, it would come to an end, since its being is precisely in its becoming. Thought never attains this adequacy, but is always attaining it, because the meaning of its becoming is that it comes to be what it was not. So it has two aspects, adequacy and inadequacy, universality and particularity. And since the particularity is the negation of the subject, there follows the self-reaffirmation of feeling, which is love as an eternal falling in love.

But falling in love with what? With others, with another, with oneself. First of all with oneself, because feeling is the pleasure of the subject which is not yet, but is generating itself, and so has desire of itself and is satisfying that desire; it tends to its own being and is fulfilling that tendency. In this absolute and transcendental sense we must say that the spirit is originally egoistic. But clearly this egoism as self-love, when the self is infinite, cannot be distinguished from the love of God; it contains in itself every other possible love that this fundamental love can give birth to. And it is not barren; for the subject which loves itself projects and objectifies itself. Whether like bestirs itself to approach like, or whether it makes no advances, the object always germinates within the subject. Then we have the other. This other is identical with the subject, but at first is opposed and hostile to it, either as something limiting its original infinity or as a person confronting it and impressing upon it that the subject is not everything and that there are others besides it. To resolve this opposition and limitation, to win oneself back as a true infinite subject, is to love something other than oneself, but only insofar as identical with oneself. And then men find things which they begin to call their own, their property, a sort of extension of their personality—a piece of land where they squat and which they will defend with their lives against any possible aggression—which they so identify with their life and being that to lose their property seems a kind of death. And then each finds a person who seems the necessary complement of his own, either because he feels a sexual need and finds in the other what is lacking in his own person and joins with the other in a unity that has a sure foundation in his own feeling, or because this other adds an element that he feels in some way is lacking in his own life.

6. *From Love of Self to Love of God*

Love, thus, solves the most difficult and complicated problems of reflection with extreme simplicity. Reflection aims, often by long and indirect methods, at restoring to consciousness the certainty of the subjectivity of the object; at bringing man into touch with what seems distant and alien or mysterious and at making it familiar, friendly and clear. In this way all that troubles our natural joy in life and makes us uneasy, anxious, embarrassed or sad, hurting our feelings or thwarting our personality, is transformed into an instrument for the exercise of our virtues, our strength, our better nature. Love opens the mind and releases it from all those little ideas connected with the little idea of our own personality, falsely conceived as a particular person. Does not experience teach us how, with this opening up of infinite feeling, love suddenly reveals to us the brotherhood of man, and how all men are ready to embrace in a single feeling? And does it not also reveal to us the providential goodness of things, of our great mother earth, who has borne us, who nourishes us, and whose strength is our inner support—a kindly and devoted mother who gives the courage to live, making us love our life, in which we have to do all the good, be it much or little, than we can? Love, with its comparatively instinctive immediacy of feeling, unites all men and things in the human subjectivity, which is the root of all thought, and all action. It is through love that man expands himself ever more freely in the world where his action and thought must develop; it is through love that he acquires a more vigorous faith in the life that he can live and the good he can do.

And what is the last end of all that practical and speculative strife and of the struggle and warfare which beset man's path? What good purpose do they serve? We fight to conquer, to beat down the obstacles that one by one hinder our steps. We argue to convince others of our truths, or to confirm in ourselves the conviction that we have the truth, so that we can renounce the assent of an opponent who, from our point of view, has been refuted. We wage war to exterminate the enemy or to make him accept terms which will secure our interests and satisfy the needs for which we went to war. The end we seek, which moves us to action, is always the recovery of a lost harmony, some peace and realization of the spirit, which it must find in itself if it is to live in the infinite liberty of feeling, loving itself with what has been called *amor intellectualis.*[d] Such love has been justly attributed to God also as an *amor sui ipsius intellectualis.*[e] This is an exact definition of the spirit, which by the path of thought returns to itself, to the subject, which is feeling and love—love of self and love of all others, since every other thing is identified with the very being of the loving subject.

7. *The Universality of Beauty and the Alleged Limits of Art*

Thus we get a clearer and clearer idea of beauty as a property of feeling or of the subject. For we love all that is beautiful, but the real object of our love is the intimate being of the subjectivity of feeling. We love art and all works of art, and every product or productive activity of the spirit, because they are nothing but thought. And there is no concrete thought, that is, thought that anyone thinks, which does not turn out to be the thought of feeling. Thought is like a body which is only alive because it contains a soul that can feel and make itself felt, if we are not too obtuse, in every part of the body.

The idea of art, as the activity which creates beauty, now appears clear; for it is evident that this is the very same activity in which thought consists. It is not hard for anyone to argue that thought does not create beauty, but truth. And it may indeed be supposed that to comprehend the essential nature of art we must leave thought out of the question. However, we have seen that, if the spirit produces anything, it can only do so through the total rhythm of its dialectic, which is the rhythm of thought. And thought is not mere subject but self-consciousness.

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[d] By Spinoza.

[e] Intellectual love of himself.

Hence arise the desperate attempts to classify the products of the spirit, by putting them into two distinct categories—works of art and works of science or thought. In the sphere of literature this distinction leads to the separation of poetry from prose. But no sooner is the classification made than doubts begin to arise. Does a prose comedy fail to be a work of art merely because it is not put into verse? To which class do novels belong? And Leopardi's *Dialogues?* And Plato's *Dialogues*, at least those most admired for liveliness of characterization and splendor of form? Are writers like Dante and Goethe poets only, or are they also thinkers and philosophers? Can we not speak of the philosophy of Leopardi or of Petrarch, because they appear in the history of literature as poets? Is there not in the *Divine Comedy* an evident religious, political, and practical aim? In the face of these questions either the obvious facts are denied as a matter of principle, or a third category must be added to the two previous ones, that of poet-philosopher, or artist-philosopher like Leonardo, and a third literary type—that of poetic prose. But is Campanella[1] a poet only in his *Poems?* Is he wrong in calling these poems *philosophical?* Vico is not a great poet in his poetry; but is there not a high poetical vein in his *Scienza nuova?* And though Bruno has such rare and turbid strains of inspiration in his allegorical sonnets, is he not filled and carried away by poetic frenzy in many pages of the *Dialogues?*

If we take art and thought in this material sense and consider men, one by one, as found in experience, and examine the spiritual life of their works according to their material shapes and the ways in which they can be more or less rationally classified and collected, then every distinction is futile. No accuracy and acuteness can avoid gross errors of judgment; such errors are noted both in the history of poetry, or of Italian literature in general, and in the history of philosophy; in the former, until quite recently, there was no room for writers of the force of Bruno and Vico; in the latter, a place was denied, with fulsome pedantry, to Leonardo or Galileo.

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[1] Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), Italian philosopher, who fought scholasticism and foreshadowed the experimental method.

The fact is that man does nothing but think, and his whole life is thought. He thinks, whether his thought takes shape in words, in musical notes, in lines and figures, colors, stones, and marble, or whether it is brought to bear, by his actions, on the system of nature or on human relations. Every form of thought is the creation of a new reality because it is the creation of a personality and of the world that belongs to this personality, neither of which could come to exist without the act of thought. If we look for thought in the forms in which it is realized—a state, a victory, a treaty of peace or alliance, an institution, a word, a poem, a system, a picture, a statue, a building—what we always find is a man thinking. He has a problem before him and he solves it so far as he realizes self-consciousness in the synthesis of a subject (which is the one subject) with the object (which is the one object of the subject). In this synthesis we shall necessarily always find the three elements that constitute it: the subject, the object, and their relation. Thought consists in the relation; but within the relation there is the object, and above all there is the subject. If there were no subject the relation which is born of it certainly would not rain from heaven. Thus every man is a man, that is, thought; but first of all he is an artist, that is to say that he has a soul and shows it by thinking.

Within the synthesis of thought, as within every synthesis, it is possible to analyze. But analysis, we must always remember, is the analysis of a synthesis. In the analysis the subject is just a subject; but it is the subject of a definite synthesis, which is a definite thought. It is only in this synthesis that we can see it, study it, and know it for what it is. As a result of analysis we can see the whole history of the spirit in its uniqueness, unity, and completeness (that fragment of history, ever capable of expansion, to which our horizon is limited) from the purely subjective point of view. We can see in every work of the spirit a work of art; we can equally see a work of art in the whole work of the spirit, which is history itself. But we can change our point of view and within history fix our attention on the abstract object from that nonsubjective point of view which is transcendent or religious; or we can take the properly historical point of view and fix our attention on the synthesis, thought in its infinite freedom, in which the object reaches its adequacy to the subject. What we look at is always the same thing but seen in a different perspective. A scientific or philosophical treatise where we could not discover and enjoy the least artistic element cannot be anything but a plagiarism into which the author has put absolutely nothing of himself. In this case, we do not really have a treatise, in addition to the one plagiarized. Whatever of his own an author puts into a book must spring from the subjectivity of his self, and more or less reflect his feeling and therefore be tinged with poetry. So on starlit nights, when the dazzling light of the sun is absent, we may say it is dark in the woods. But when our eyes have grown accustomed, even in the densest thicket, we can distinguish one thing from another. Light is not wholly absent; the rays pouring down from heaven, however distant their sources, are enough to make vision possible.

Some forms of thought, such as morals and politics, have forcibly attracted the attention of the human spirit for practical reasons. And out of distinctions purely empirical, because drawn between things not differing in kind, it has made absolutely separate categories. And so far as we rely on such distinctions it is possible to distinguish, within the continuous and homogeneous material of history, the growth of the moral or the political spirit. But such a spirit, of course, does not develop only in the holders of definite morals or politics in a well-defined series. Its concrete work is carried on in the whole living and organic complex of historical reality. So if a man devotes himself to some special branch of history, and thinks that he can separate from it one material element and earmark it for the history of philosophy, or of art, or of religious thought, or of morality, or of political life or anything else, he will certainly be moving along false and unreal abstractions and inventing fictions out of his own brain. The very material he has picked out for treatment will prove this, for it will refuse to develop or come alive in his hands since it is indeed an amputated and lifeless limb.

In conclusion, art is the whole spirit seen from the point of view of art, and the history of art is the whole history of the spirit from that point of view. It is unnecessary to add that every historian, according to the particular interests which give rise to the particular problems that he proposes to solve, carves out of this totality a material of his own. This material will be more or less real and alive to the extent that it reflects the whole in miniature and shares in the life and reality which properly belong to that whole alone. We may clasp only the hand of a living man; but for the very reason that the hand is warm and in its clasp we feel the living soul of the man, we know it cannot have been cut off and separated from his person, which alone by its own life can make us feel the life of the hand.

8. *All Is Art insofar as It Is Art*

Is all, then, art? This is the question asked by the timid critics who immediately conclude that if all is art, nothing is art. But this will not be the conclusion arrived at by an intelligent and attentive reader, that is, by any reader who has followed me this far. The conclusion is that all is art *so far as it is art*. If, in order to distinguish art from other things, we had to find a bit of spiritual reality which is all art and nothing else, and another bit which bears no trace of art, we might easily decide that such a distinction from our point of view is impossible. Of those who flatter themselves that they can make such a distinction, I should like to ask one favor: that they consider whether there is much use in a distinction that has always embarrassed historians and thrown into confusion the most careful classifications by which writers have hoped to assign to each kind of history its sphere of competence.

There are differences, of course, or at least there ought to be, but between one artist and another, not between artists and non-artists. To grasp these differences we must look at no other qualities than purely artistic ones. If we are looking for the deep distinction which separates artists and makes them differ from one another, it is absolutely irrelevant that one of them writes verse and the other prose, that one sings of Orlando and another of Godfrey, that one exhibits a vision which may be called imaginary and the other a true story, that one shuts himself up with his thought in a scene of nature or of humanity and the other expatiates with his thought in abstract problems of speculation. For art lies entirely in the form of feeling in which any material developed in thought lives. The important difference for a critic or historian of Italian literature is not that between Dante and Galileo but that between Dante and Fazio degli Uberti.[g] He must be able to distinguish between these in order to recognize poetry and to point out where it lies; and on the other hand he must be able to enter into the *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* and into many letters of the great Pisan astronomer in order to observe the powerful mind working within it, which is something akin to the mind that gives both stability and vibration to the immense edifice of Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

The difference ordinarily felt between art and science in a broad sense is that indicated by the old-fashioned esthetics in its distinction between works of imagination and works of learning, the former devoted to representations of beauty, the latter to representations of truth. This distinction, however, was without foundation, since it follows from our arguments that truth is beautiful (because the object is also the subject), and beauty is true (because the subject is also the object). Certainly it was not easy to destroy the barriers erected between truth and imagination—the former, whether apprehended by sense or intellect, binding the human spirit in iron chains, the latter being free and unshackled, master of its own world. The distinction was complicated by the contrast between sense and intellect, which the old theory of knowledge was unable to overcome. The activity of the imagination was confined to the sensible world, although it substituted representations of what is merely possible in the sensible world for representations of what is real. On the other hand cognition of truth started from sensible things, but solely in order to rise from them to the ideas, universals, thought, in which alone it was possible to discover the truth of sensible things. Those who seek knowledge of the truth may indeed indulge in the sense-perception of particulars; but sooner or later they must purify the object of their attention from all traces of sensibility and feed their minds on pure thought. On the contrary, those who delight in works of imagination dwell with their minds in the world of sense, though with no feeling for it; they are in the midst of things and persons unseen and untouched, which yet seem visible and tangible, so *convincing* are they, and so like the real things and persons of the world in which our senses tell us we are living. Thus in art we all feel that we are living among living people, with our feet on firm ground, surrounded by everything which excites our interests and passions in the real world. Science, on the contrary, transports us to a world outside time and space, among ideas always and everywhere valid, where all men feel bereft of every particular human interest. They feel themselves thrown into a world of ghosts, of mere shadows, where the arms that would embrace beloved things or persons clasp empty air.

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[g] Fazio degli Uberti, Italian lyric poet of the fourteenth century (died around 1367).

But we know now that there is no need to destroy these barriers, because they do not exist. They were sheer fictions from which thought could not free itself while it clung obstinately to the old realistic system defined above. Its first error was to suppose that imagination was something parallel to, but other than, representation of reality. We have, of course, imaginary and real representations; but they are all produced by the one activity which constructs experience; and the whole system, with its center solidly fixed in the subject, is the touchstone for the representations to be retained as real and for those to be rejected as imaginary. This concept certainly could not be reached until the theory of knowledge had effected the revolution which made it possible to look for reality within the experience of the subject and not outside it and anteriorly to it. The second realistic error was to believe that the function of the intellect, as conceived by the ancients, was that of dematerializing and impoverishing the sensible world down to something intangible and quite outside the realm of sense. But, if we give to the word "sense" its only possible meaning—that of feeling—its realm is so vast that the sun never sets upon it. And feeling (the excited and perturbed mind of which Vico speaks) is not only sensitive to those particular things and persons which compose the world existing around us in space and time; it extends to everything thinkable and, as we have said, is always the soul of thought.

The world of sense, the only world of sense there is, is not outside us but within us, and out of this world of sense are born and grow all the persons and things among which we live our life with all our interests and passions. Once this has been understood, it becomes clear that every advance in thought, through which the synthesis (the life of our feeling) is more and more intensely realized, must be a progress in the real world. And this real world is that exciting world, capable of stirring and thrilling our passions, which was once identified solely with so-called creatures of imagination.

9. *Art as the Primary Form of the Spirit*

We must maintain, on the contrary, the old doctrine of Vico, Herder, and others, and give it a new interpretation. Such a doctrine holds that art is the form of spiritual life in the infancy of both humanity and the individual man, and that consequently it is characteristic of all times of barbarity whether primitive or modern. Feeling, in fact, like the sensuous imagination of Vico, is the starting point of the spirit; and although man may remind himself, at the beginning of his day, that the day's work will be one of thought, he is still governed by the form of feeling unsubdued by the discipline of reflection and analysis.

He is still governed by this feeling because, even when it is subdued, it never diminishes and weakens, for thought is the incarnation and therefore the realization of feeling. But in this realization, feeling incarnates and embodies itself in the very product of its own activity; it becomes to some extent concealed in the new form of the body which now incorporates it. This body by its movement and sensibility shows the power of the soul within; but the soul is now clothed with the organism, and what is within often escapes outward observation.

At this point it is hardly worth observing that even in man's infancy feeling is not a merely abstract soul, or substantial form, to use St. Thomas' term. The soul is already body; but the body is underdeveloped, and the soul seems to speak and to reveal itself more ingenuously in its relative immediacy, unhidden by the veil which the work of reflection will daily wrap more thickly about it. It is clear that, owing to the abstract or transcendental concept of feeling, art, even in its most primitive and simple times, is always a stage or aspect of the complete and concrete synthesis of the spirit. At that stage it is the most prominent aspect merely because the work of thought is then less intensive. If we say literally that art is characteristic of man's infancy, we must not understand by infancy the earliest stage but rather the starting point of every stage, an ideal point from which every man of flesh and blood, however young, has already taken the first step, since he is already on his journey along the road of the spirit in the synthesis of thought.

10. *The Body as the Expression of the Soul, and Speech*

When the poet writes the divine verse: *Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem,*[h] what he so marvelously underlines is not the first awakening of the soul, but the dawn of thinking intelligence.

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[h] Virgil, Eclogue iv, 60: "Tiny baby, begin to recognize your mother by smiling."

Even before the recognition of the mother's face is expressed and made known in the smile of infant love, the infant soul has already loved, and again and again looked with longing on the breast from which his life and his very self are drawn. But to make the verse quite true the word "begin" (*incipe*) would have to be used in such a qualified and approximate sense that the real beginning would vanish at a point of time infinitely remote. At any rate, as soon as man recognizes anything, and that is, as soon as he thinks, he expresses by his smile, by his glance, with his arms, with vague gestures of his hands, in short with his whole natural body, the inner movements of his soul. For he has already a soul, and from the first dawn of consciousness it can already be mirrored within itself.

We all know that the natural body is the physical means by which souls communicate with one another. A body which was dumb and absolutely motionless, in which not only the tongue was silent but every limb, every feature, every fiber remained unmoved, would shut up its soul in impenetrable mystery. But mere silence is often eloquent, and no mystery, that has a meaning, can hide forever from man's inquiring mind. There is the language of words and the language of silence, and even the absolute immobility of living things has a meaning of its own, though somewhat obscure. To say that the soul is embodied in thought is not a sheer metaphor. The soul by realizing itself in the synthesis of thought incorporates itself in the *body* properly so-called. The soul is expressed by the body, not in its supposed physical immediacy, but in its concrete presence to consciousness, in the character it has in consciousness and for consciousness. And this is the same expression that the soul finds in thought. It is in fact impossible to think without speech. Speech is the word of the mind and exists in the so-called physical world, which it modifies by its presence. Spoken or written words, figures imagined or drawn, shapes thought of or carved, all these are formed thoughts, or expressions of thought, which become part of nature. Thought may become a book which has a certain shape, size, and weight, like any physical thing; or it may become an architectural structure whose bronze and marble shall defy the fury of the elements and the gnawing tooth of time. But even if it does not become material in any such way as these, its very spiritual nature forces us to picture it in the same world of material things where men speak and sing by means of a mechanism like that with which the wild beasts howl in the desert, the nightingales warble in the thickets and the mountains lift their heads to heaven.

It is this appearance of thought in the natural world which reveals the secrets of the soul and makes it possible for a listener to understand the speaker's thought or for the man who looks at a picture to enter into the painter's soul. But what is this *nature* in which thought forms and manifests itself? Nature, as we have seen, is simply our body. And the body in its relative immediacy, as we always find it at the bottom of our personality, is feeling. This feeling is one, one for each who feels, and one for all; so that in its purity, when freed from all that obscures rather than expresses it, it unites all men and binds them by the very love that chains every man to himself. That is why we all find one another, and come to understand one another, in nature. A picture, painted and given a place in the world of natural things, takes on an existence for all men, as well as for the painter. Feeling is the fundamental unity, the common denominator, the universal language of the spirit. Whatever comes out of the human mind must strike and interest our feeling in order to be understood and to have universal value. What does not touch man to the quick may be clearly and conclusively thought out and proved, it may be put into the best words suggested by the rules of art, and yet interest no one and therefore attract not the slightest attention. It stands before the mind's eye without being looked at and so without being seen. In such instances thought seems to find itself before a great building, into which it might be glad to enter, but to which it can find no door. For feeling is the only door of the spirit. This is the reason for the great importance that educators attach to *interest.* Although they often misunderstand what interest is, and reduce it to a kind of superstition, they clearly indicate its close relation between any truth that we can recognize as such, and all that is most subjective in the spirit.

Here arises a very important consideration on the nature of speech. Speech is thought; but by its natural character it points back to feeling. It shares in the natures of both thought and art, and we shall never understand the essence of language so long as we look only at its poetic or subjective side. The author[1] who has identified esthetics with linguistics was led to do so by his dualistic doctrine of a form understood as the expression of a content (namely feeling) existing independently of the expressive activity. Once we grant that art is the first step taken by the spirit in the expression or elaboration of its object, there is no doubt that from the beginning of such elaboration language is necessary. But when art has been reduced to the purest subjectivity, no mortal tongue can tell what goes on. Before there can be expression, the purely subjective feeling of that dumb stage, which Vico describes, must be outgrown. We must have reached consciousness, which is self-consciousness.

There is no language without self-consciousness. In the history of nature self-consciousness begins with man, and man is in fact the only speaking animal. To advance in self-consciousness through an ever deeper self-analysis (which involves the analysis of everything), to advance in thought and knowledge, is to advance in the power of exactly expressing one's inner self. The subject must make itself its object and realize the real synthesis of the spirit, so that the soul may burst, so to speak, into the world and exhibit itself in it, or may draw the world into itself and make it thrill and vibrate with its own life. Before this can happen, thought must appear and analyse what in the beginning was indistinct, and distinguish its many elements from one another, and articulate and anatomize it into the structure of unity in multiplicity which is the form of thought. Then, as we have said, feeling multiplies and organizes itself; its body, which was *in nuce*, develops parts that, although distinct, are unified in the sphere of its living existence. Thus the various physical elements are distinguished and become the many words which are the vitals of the organism, in which thought shapes and realizes itself. They are the physical elements into which that natural unity splits itself—the natural unity which is the unity of the body or *objectum mentis*, the very fundamental feeling. If we want to understand speech, it is useless to take the words one by one as thought enumerates them; useless to look them up in the dictionary; useless to consider them phonetically as a continuum of noise, or grammatically for their inflections; useless, in short, to consider them mechanically as what they are in themselves apart from the soul that vibrates in the synthesis of the expressed thought. Thought is thinkable on one condition: that it be the thinking of a thinker and so distinguish itself in the flux arising in the thinking soul.

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[1] Croce.

To sum up, language is an organism, which, in the multiplicity of its development, is thought, but in the unity which animates that thought is feeling. So far as it is feeling it has meaning; detached from that feeling it is ashes. It is a multiplicity in unity and therefore always spirit and not, as is commonly thought, a sort of clothing for thought or feeling, which the life of the spirit puts on. Besides the thought, which supplies the element of variety or multiplicity, and the feeling, which binds this multiplicity by its own unity, there is nothing more.

SECOND PART

THE ATTRIBUTES OF ART

I

Art, the Arts, and the Beauty of Nature

1. *The Unity and Multiplicity of Language: The Accent*

Thought is a circle: from unity through multiplicity it returns to unity; from the subject through the object to the subject again, for the unity realized between the subject and object becomes a new subject. A similar process can be clearly observed in nutrition, where the food ingested, if assimilated, is fused and identified with the body itself, which then requires more food. The same thing occurs in the development of the spirit, which is always toiling and must continue to toil, since it is eternally not only a synthesis, but a synthesis of its two terms and, therefore, each of the two, and so, eternal subject. Whatever thought we succeed in thinking, the result will never be the solution to all problems, and therefore never the absolute objectification of the subject. The subject will be transformed, but it will always be a subject whose task it is to objectify itself. In this perpetual circle is realized the eternal synthesis which is the very essence of the spirit.

Such a circular process explains both the possibility of the opposite points of view from which every element of spiritual life can be regarded, and the necessity for overcoming their opposition. Thus language, which was dealt with in the last chapter of the First Part, can definitely be regarded both as multiplicity (of words and constructions) and unity. If we confine ourselves to studying its multiplicity, we fall into the mechanistic concept of language and miss its spiritual value. If, for fear of this mechanization and consequent paralysis of the life of the language, we absolutely shut our eyes to the multiplicity, we end with an abstract and mystical unity that contradicts the facts of language, in which there is no stable element that can be repeated. The truth is that every language is both unity and multiplicity. Speech is movement—a movement proceeding from the unity of a full mind which needs to express itself in order to relieve the seething tumult that seems sometimes to tie our tongue. But this is the inspiration and the impulse to think and to speak; there is as yet nothing clear or formed or definite in the mind. To speak is to advance from this condition to discourse, which is carried on by various elements of thought that are so many images, so many parts, as it were, of the primitive unity of feeling, and therefore so many words. These are connected and thought together as a single discourse, being animated by the subjective unity of feeling which was taken as a starting point. For the subject takes part in this discourse and is always present and active in it, in every single part and in the whole. Discourse is carried on by means of the multiplicity insofar as, by that very fact, we always return to the unity. If we let the unity escape us we would lose the thread. Consequently, in order to read a book with understanding, one must get to the last page and the last word. When we have read that, if we have never lost the thread, we are left with a unique definite impression. This alone can give the right accent to every word on a second reading, which will be more profitable and profound than the first, however attentive this might have been. Until we have reached the end, which is always the beginning and, in a sense, coincides with it, there is no really intelligible discourse.

Thus, in a certain sense, we may say that language consists in the accent, in the accent that gives meaning to the words, in the tone which, as we say, makes the music. Depending on the accent with which we speak, the same words can have opposite meanings, and admiration may turn into irony, or threatening commands into suppliant prayers. The accent is the speaker's feeling; it is an accent which has one sound in the most different languages that have been formed in the historical development of the human spirit, and which is understood by all men because it is the feeling of humanity, regardless of nation or time. It is the desperate cry of Sappho's passion, which resounds throughout the centuries, and to which all human ears listen, despite the difficulties of the language. This accent of the spoken word is the same feeling imprinted in the glance and the expression of a painted or sculpted face.

But to look for this feeling (accent, tone, expression), outside the elements in which it is realized would evidently be to grasp at a shadow. One would look for that feeling, prior to thought, which is really nothing. The accent is in discourse and belongs to discourse. Expression belongs to the eyes, but only insofar as the eyes are on a face. The tone is developed and realized in a melodic phrase.

Language is, therefore, both feeling and thought. It is thought insofar as it is feeling, and feeling insofar as it is thought; it is a unity which contains in itself a multiplicity.

2. *Technique*

If we keep in mind this process, which is characteristic of language insofar as language is equivalent to the esthetic process of the spirit, I do not think it difficult to understand certain artistic facts which have given rise to problems hitherto mostly unsolved.

The first of these problems is that of the relation between art and *technique*. There is the technique of the architect and that of the sculptor and of the painter; there is the technique of the poet, of the orator, of the writer (poetics, metrics, rhetoric). Technique consists in bodies of knowledge which the artist needs in order to give concrete form to the images or concepts of his mind; it varies and perfects itself with the progress of scientific thought. Leonardo's anatomical studies, undertaken for the sake of a truthful portraiture of the human body, belong only indirectly to the history of painting. His designs and notes have, in fact, every mark of scientific research in the strictest sense, and find their place among the documents for the history of anatomy. Design is geometry. Technique in general is thought. It is learned in schools like any other branch of knowledge. Art schools, in their positive function,[1] are more correctly schools of artistic technique; for art in its proper sense, we must depend on the genius of the students.

But besides technique there is *pseudo technique*, the technique which is mistaken for art and which gives rise to schools, styles, imitations. When the body is mistaken for the soul, the result is materialism or the mechanical art of good men of letters, of painters with correct design and learned coloring, of the pedants in every school. But *mediocribus esse poetis*[a] . . . and all the rest. There is no place for mediocrity in poetry, because the feeling which makes its whole beauty is either there or not there, in contrast with the art which comes from study and reflection and which is not art but technique.

At any rate, leaving pseudo technique out of the question, technique is clearly distinguished from art. It belongs to the realm of thought, but thought which returns to feeling and is permeated by it. Thus it has been rightly said[2] that technique is a precondition of art, in the sense that the artist already possesses and masters it with confidence, and finds in it not hindrance but help to the expression of his feeling, as if he followed an already cleared and familiar road to reach his goal. Technique then is an element which has become part of the subject or artist and therefore enters into his feeling. Being master of a certain technique, the subject can now use it to fashion its images and to objectify itself.

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[1] Schools also have a negative function of the greatest importance. This is fulfilled by the teacher, who, by his own example, or that of the great artists critically observed and studied, teaches the pupils to liberate their feeling from the trammels of false technique.

[2] Benedetto Croce in one of his best essays. See *Problemi di estetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1910), pp. 247–255.

[a] Horace, *Ars poetica*, 373: "Neither gods nor men nor bookshops have use for mediocre poets."

3. *The Preconditions of Art, and Language as Technique*

Among the preconditions of art, where technique has its place, are all the elements which constitute the personality of the artist as pure feeling. The first of these elements is the body, universal nature as something actual. What psychologists call temperament, with all the badly analyzed and consequently badly distinguished elements of which it is compounded, is simply this primary position of the subject, that is, feeling—feeling because it is body and therefore the whole of nature. For when we say body, we mean body in any of its stages, from birth to death and even before birth and after death, that is, as something underlying the particular formation of the individual. It may be small or large; it is always the infinite body which is feeling and nothing else.

After the body, comes everything which gradually forms this body of feeling in its development, that is to say, in the process of thought. This development takes place in the form of definite knowledge and definite language. For knowledge is language and language is knowledge. Both, in their essential identity, are the result of a continual development, in which thought is gradually defined and language is learned by attention, judgment, reflection, reasoning, by analyzing and synthesizing, in short, by thinking. As soon as any form of thought is attained or a personality formed, it becomes a new form of feeling and develops into new syntheses, without which it would be lost and annihilated. This accounts for the possibility of rest and sleep, and both of changing a line of thought and also returning to it, and of ceasing to speak a language without entirely forgetting it. There is a point on the circle where feeling returns to itself enriched with its past life. It does not stand still in its changed condition of existence, but profits by it for further life in whatever direction it may move. There is no difference between a man who knows a language and one who does not, until they begin to speak. Then a difference emerges which was latent in the subjectivity of feeling. Similarly, between the athlete with his powerful muscles and the slender figure of one who never attempted strenuous exercises there is no difference as long as both are asleep. Every man acts according to what he is (a body, feeling; a certain body, a certain feeling) and he is what he is as a result of his past life, his past thought, the knowledge and language he has acquired, all of which have become, so to speak, flesh of his flesh. That very same ease that a simple man has in speaking his mind in two words, in a phrase that comes from his heart, belongs also to the great poet who achieves the revelation of whatever feeling whispers within him by a more deliberate and consummate art. Language, like all the other products of thought that return to feeling in order to refresh and strengthen it for still higher achievements, is a technique. It is, therefore, a precondition of art, one which disappears in the actual form of feeling.

4. *The Alleged Externalization of the Work of Art*

Besides language and every technique of expression, we must consider as preconditions of art all physical means such as sound, color, stone, marble. The artist uses these in his art not to externalize, as has been suggested, his image, but to create it. Nothing spiritual can ever be externalized, because there is nothing conceivable outside the spirit. The artist does not copy; nor does he imitate external objects or the internal images of the world in which his feeling has been internally objectified. The artist is always present in his creation; for his activity is purely spiritual, and the only objects of spiritual activity are those which could not exist apart from it. That is why they are rightly called its creations.

But it is one thing to have a vague idea and another to give it a complete shape. Before any color has been laid on, the artist already sees his own color between the lines; and, even in designing them, his hand has already been guided by the living image of the figure, which he already sees clothed in that color. It is one thing to have sketched out a poem in your mind, and another to see it completed and to repeat it mentally from beginning to end as it will be written on paper as soon as the poet has the necessary material means. When he has them they will constitute a new situation for his *self*. For he no longer will have a hand which knows how to use a pen, but a hand furnished with that instrument and in condition to use it. He will be like a person enriched with a new word just learned or invented, who at once discovers in himself the ability to use it for a new form of self-objectification. This is not the addition of something external to something internal in order to supplement or complete the latter. The internal fact itself is the new feeling—the feeling which is a new body, a new nature.

The so-called externalization of the work of art is the internal completion of the work itself by virtue of the subject's reaching a certain stage in the development of its own nature, which is one with the subject and not external to it, as the careless and superficial materialist likes to suppose.

5. *The Content as Technique*

Finally we must consider the content of art as one of its preconditions and as identical with its technique. The content, like language, like the body, and like nature, comes to light and can be accounted for in restrospect within the objectivity of thought. But it could not come to light in the object, which is the mirror of the subject, if it had not first been in the subject. The words *first* and *later* are of course used in an atemporal sense, for the subject does not exist as pure subject, but it comes into being together with its object by virtue of the synthesis. So, empirically speaking, Ludovico Ariosto knows his sources before sitting down to write his poem. It is plain, however, that the real content in its precise words and details and in the looks and bearing of every single character only comes to birth with the work of art. We can analyze such a content because the poet, yielding to his inspiration, has created the work and, in so doing, has placed the content before our eyes. We may distinguish an abstract and a concrete content: the first, as it may be inferred from the second, is a precondition of the work of art; the second is the result of that work.

Content is the whole thought, the entire process developing in our mind through the creation of the work of art; it is that which stands before us as an object when we become aware of the work. It is both thought and words, for thought is in words; it is thought and sounds and lines and colors. Content is therefore also something equivalent to technique, though generally appearing to be its opposite. And the whole is absorbed by the subject and transformed into pure feeling.

6. *The Multiplicity of Art as Technique and the Literary Kinds*

There are many techniques, but only one art in its essential esthetic character. The multiplicity of the arts is the same as the multiplicity of the techniques in which art is realized. The traditional classification of the arts with their subspecies results from the application of external criteria by which works of art are grouped according to the technical means employed in them. These technical means are varied by definition, since technique is manifold and multiplicity always implies variety.

From the point of view of technique, poetry is one thing and painting another. Consequently, estheticians like Lessing, who assign to each art absolute limits, are unchallengeable. Speech can never say what a painting says, and conversely. It is therefore a blunder to use a musical term in the criticism of plastic art, or a term of painting in literary criticism, with any claim to exactitude.

But such limits are of the same kind as those by which one word is absolutely distinguished from another so that it can never be substituted for it. There are no synonyms except in the mind of misguided grammarians. And we speak with the philosophical rigor necessary to a full and absolute understanding of things, not only are two words of similar meanings not synonyms but *no word is ever synonymous with itself*. For every word has a particular meaning in each particular context, and the context is always a discourse, that is, a thought in which the subject objectifies itself. If the subject tried to recover its old self by repeating the previous act of self-objectification it would not succeed in a million years, because in the rhythm of its synthesis it is always becoming and can never stop and can never be again what it once was.

Every word is a technique by which the subject acquires consciousness of itself. And no word can ever be identical with any other. Every soul has its own word, its own system of words, its own language, its own work, its own thought. Hence the inanity of all attempts to consider a given technique in abstract, for it is the technique of a given soul, the only glass in which that soul can mirror itself.

The classification of the arts can be compared to the vocabulary of a language. A language may be defined and enclosed within certain limits, but a philologist with even the most elementary feeling for the spirituality of language will try to widen these limits infinitely, and will treat the language and each of its parts as a *historical* development which is never complete. And there is no harm in taking something abstract as an object of study, so long as we remember that this object, in its configuration, is a product of abstraction and that we must bring everything to concreteness. This is the procedure of the anatomist, who mentally sees every organ which is separately set before him as being in its place in the system of the organism and in the ambit of its life. So the study of a language in its vocabulary will not be useless if, after thus learning it, we can absorb into our souls all the materials we have acquired and make them living elements; if, in short, we can forget in order to remember better and profit by the knowledge we have acquired.

The classification of the arts can better be compared to the history of all the works of art known to us, in which every work has its own technique and can therefore be considered as a separate art. So there are not five arts—poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture—nor six, nor a hundred, but an infinite number, since works of art are infinite.

The same may be said about the *literary kinds*, another vague and ill-defined esthetic concept on which philosophical and critical reflection on art continues to toil. The *literary kinds* result from a classification, within the art of literature, analogous to that of the different arts, although the *fundamentum divisionis* is not so external and material for the *kinds* as for the arts. The criterion used, however, is the same, and the differences we pointed out are only related to technique and have nothing to do with the essence of art. Once we agree that the essence of art is the subjective feeling breathed into a thought, it follows that the sensible form in which this thought is developed and actualized concerns merely the technical means of expression. Alfieri[b] is the same poet in both the sonnets and the tragedies. But his reading of the French tragedies and of Plutarch, together with other occurrences, put into his mind the idea of writing tragedies himself. He selects his tragic subjects and sketches out the plots in prose. But his theory convinces him that verse, and one particular rhythm of verse, is better fitted to tragedy than is the prose discourse. All these are problems which he sets himself to solve one after another, and to the solution of which he will increasingly apply his technical ability. But they have nothing whatever to do with the fundamental problem, that is, with what the poet Alfieri feels ever more clearly and forcibly, and wishes to make others feel. Not that all this technique is irrelevant to his art; but once it penetrates the poet's mind it becomes for him precisely what his lips are when he forms the words on which he impresses his feeling, or what the pen is when he traces the letters to fix those words on paper. In other words, technique is irrelevant to feeling. What we recognize as Alfieri in his actual poetry is himself, his sheer feeling. In the light of that feeling we lose sight of the book in which the words are printed, and of the words themselves, and of the characters which he sets in action in his dramas. There is nothing that interferes between us and the poet's soul. Analysis may always supervene and distinguish these elements, but while we press our analysis his soul retires and escapes us. In the synthesis all the elements are brought to unity and that unity is the feeling of that soul. Unless such a feeling is revealed and fills our hearts, every tragedy is a poetic failure, however elaborately worked out or, in other words, however great the technical skill which the writer exhibits to our admiration.

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[b] Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), Italian dramatist.

Every drama, again, can be either read or acted. When it is acted the technical devices are more numerous and the problems are multiplied. But art always remains something absolutely simple, in which all these accretions must be fused and obliterated. Our attention must not remain captured by the staging or by the costumes of the actors; we must forget all the materiality of the theater in that illusion of ideal truth which is necessary to the understanding and enjoyment of the dramatic action. The very plot itself, in the complexity of its different elements, must become a means for the communication of feeling. If all these conditions are not fulfilled, the drama will leave us cold or disappointed and will have failed.

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, may be said of comedies and satires and similar types of compositions, where the poet's personality seems to be detached from his subject matter and to react against it with a feeling of hostility rather than to live and expand in it. Certainly when the poet plays with his images and makes fun of his subject matter in general, he does not attach himself to it or breath his spirit into it. In fact he tells himself that he is not in earnest; and the spirit produces nothing when it is not in earnest. Whenever a poet succeeds in interesting us in any way, that is, in moving us, it is by forgetting himself in his subject matter and transforming himself into it. Not that he, in this case, remains serious while his subject matter is comic, but his very heart and marrow seem inspired with comic feeling; the whole world, whose spiritual vibration gives the tone to his fundamental feeling, is comic.

The same is true of epic poems and of prose narrative such as novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies. A mere story or narrative is neither poetry nor art. But whenever the writer's feeling is in it, everything is absorbed in that feeling, and there is nothing but the feeling.

7. *Poetry, Lyric, Music*

But among the various "kinds" of poetry, one has been thought, in recent times, to have the special privilege of standing for the essential form of poetry and indeed of art in general. This is the *lyric*, which has been held to be the primitive and fundamentl form of feeling. We were therefore told that *art is lyrical.*

However, if the word *lyric* is divested of its peculiar meaning, according to which lyric poetry is something other than epic or dramatic poetry and, being poetry, is neither music, nor painting, nor any other special kind of art, there is no reason for saying that art is lyric rather than that it is music (as indeed has so often been said), or painting, drama, sculpture, architecture. Architects remark empirically that their ideal is to unite in some way all figurative arts (and why not the others too?). Art in fact is lyrical because it is the expression of feeling; but it is also epic, because this feeling is objectified, is given form in something objective which fills the artist's mind and presents the world to him as an epos—as something to be contemplated by the subject. But art cannot be epic without tending to become dramatic. For this epic world is brought, by its essential identity with the subject which mirrors itself in it, to reflect humanity and so depict the conflicts and history of mankind. Whether this history is that of several individuals striving together in the effort to solve the problem of their lives, or whether it is the history made by a single individual living for his own purposes and by his own powers, the epic always unfolds as a drama. On the other hand the dramatic world of humanity, and nature itself which is the background of the human epic, live in the artist's spirit only as persons and things with a form and with attitudes expressing their inner life and echoing the soul of the artist. And what is that if not painting and sculpture? And again this humanity in nature comes together and concentrates in houses, temples, theaters, in all those microcosms made by the human will in which nature has been humanized and taught to adapt itself to our life and to play a part in it as an accessory, a setting or an instrument. And so we have architecture.

But, above all, this lyric which is supposed to be the most immediate form of art, is not, in its primitive and direct form, prose or recitative. It is speech, but speech modulated in rhythm, meter, and cadence. It is *song*. Art is lyric to the extent that it is also song—the song that is the infant's first mode of self-expression. It may grow gradually weaker as years go by until it fades into the husky voice of age; it may seem to shake off the bonds of meter and of stress and pass from verse to prose; but it never ceases. For there is no word without stress and no sentence without rhythm. Meter undergoes many changes in passing from verse to prose, as it does from one type of verse or stanza to another; but it is always present and it always imparts rhythm to the words in which feeling is embodied.

But to speak of song is to speak of music. And music can dispense with the articulate human voice, for such articulation is not in itself expressive when it is accompanied by another voice with articulation of its own, a voice that is modulated and varied in every way in order to produce the multiplicity into which subjective feeling objectifies and manifests itself. This voice, equally natural as that of man, is by man selected, controlled, and guided, as is the voice that is heard on his lips. It may be the voice of instruments skillfully contrived for the purpose; or it may be the voice of the wind blowing through the forest branches and the reeds along the river; or the voice of the brook whose murmur answers the tender feeling of the man stopping on its bank; or it may be the voice of the lark which, flying in the sky, seems to lift toward the infinite space and the light of the sun the human soul which echoes its song. Man will summon all the voices of nature into his heart; he will imprison them in his loud and well-tuned instruments, and with a new and ever more perfect technique, he will begin again and will continue to sing, always finding new words to express his feeling. This is music, which develops in a thousand ways, but it consists essentially in that measured rhythm through which feeling moves, and in moving becomes song. And this song can sound in the air, since the air too belongs to the inner nature which, as we said before, is the soul's body. But what sounds in the air must first sound in the heart, as the music sounded in the secret silences where the deaf Beethoven listened to its sublime harmonies.

Music is equally intelligible to men of the most diverse tongues, who could not understand one another if they tried to express themselves each in his own language. The most heterogeneous audience in a concert hall thrills at the vibration of a string. This has led many to believe that music, more than poetry and more than any other art, speaks to man's heart, and in its greater universality expresses, more directly than even the lyric, that primitive essence of poetry, which has the power to unite men's spirits in a single feeling. But the truth is that a violin or any other instrument is only another special kind of language. While a crowd which listens to an orator understands him because he speaks their language, a multitude which is moved by the performance of a solo knows the language of the violin, though they are of different race and tongue.

But neither the violin, nor music in general, nor painting nor any other art, not even the lyric, is the true form of art. Each is a technique, and as such it is thought—thought capable of infinite variations over which feeling always triumphs. For feeling is moved and stirred alike by the sight of a picture, the sound of a minstrel, the reading of a poem, the spectacle of a play, and even (if we have only learned the language!) by the comprehension of a lecture on philosophy, astronomy, or mathematics. A story is told of a famous lecturer in infinitesimal calculus who used to be carried away in his lectures, and, after covering the blackboard with formulae and finishing the laborious demonstration of the theorem under consideration, would stop to contemplate the picture he had produced, radiant with joy. He would express his feeling by uttering the word "beautiful!," deeply touching his students by the truth of the exclamation. The spontaneous burst of applause from the audience expresses the very feeling described by Plato in his *Ion.* The listeners feel as if invisible cords were let down from heaven to bind their souls and lift them away from earth.

8. *The Literary Kinds and the Pseudo Concepts*

All this does not imply that in feeling everything is indistinguishably dyed with a single color. Feeling is distinguished through thought and always takes on definite forms. But if we consider the working of the spirit from the point of view of art, it is always one feeling, always the same soul in all these definite forms. Whatever one of our friends may be talking about, he is always the same self, recognizable by the tone of his voice. Whatever the pose or expression of a face there is always a *je ne sais quoi* which escapes the vain attempts of scientific criminology to describe it, an indefinible "look" by which we can recognize any acquaintance as soon as he turns his face to us. The melody may vary while the fundamental theme remains the same. Chapter may follow upon chapter in a novel, episode upon episode and dialogue upon dialogue, with perfectly definite differences, and yet from the first page to the last there moves always a single spirit, we breathe the same air and dwell in the same atmosphere. There is variety, but variety within unity—the unity which makes the poetry, the warmth, the life of the whole.

Nor need we think that the infinite variety, into which art is elaborated by the technique that molds our feeling, excludes some middle term between the unity of feeling and the inexhaustible multiplicity of techniques. Although the technique of a literary "kind" is irrelevant to the esthetic essence of works of art and amounts to a mere precondition of art, in which it is absorbed, this does not imply that technique is not reflected in art or that it does not give a particular individuality to feeling. Feeling mirrors itself in technique and makes its own content out of its preconditions in the very act of objectifying itself and thus gives rise to the so-called work of art. Nor can technique, which is thought, remain a mere extrinsic appendage, for the reality of feeling is to be found only in the synthesis in which feeling is reflected in the body of thought, that is, in its technique.

The main thing, once we have apprehended art in some concrete work, where it has a subject matter (be it a tragedy, a novel or a sonnet), is to penetrate into this subject matter until we come upon the living kernel and feel in it the definite subject matter. Literary kinds are only the threshold of art. Those who want to know what art is must enter inside.

There is another school of criticism which sees in the literary kind and in each art a different form of technique, but a form generic and abstract, for concrete art is not tragedy but the *Antigone*, not painting but a Raphael or a Goya. And the consequence drawn is that, as there are two kinds of reality, the universal and the individual, we must have either art or a single work of art. A special art is not a universal concept, to which anything real corresponds, but a pseudo concept.

Such criticism has deprived the timid and the unwary of a harmless terminology, which was useful and necessary not for esthetic judgment but for the indispensable orientation it offers to the historian. But the author of this criticism, after making incredible efforts, aided partly by enthusiasm and partly by universal resignation, to drive this terminology under ground, had to yield to the practical necessities of the historian and reinstate it with all the honors.[3] The theory rests on the frail foundation of that discredited realistic doctrine which we have had more than one occasion to notice. It is the doctrine which empties consciousness, whether individual or universal, of all its contents and makes it a sort of label representing a reality that corresponds to it, although nobody can say how or why. According to this doctrine individual reality corresponds to perception or intuition, and universal reality corresponds to the concept.

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[3] See Croce's articles on the Italian "Tragedy" and "Comedy" of the sixteenth century in *La critica* of 1930.

No doubt this reality, individual or universal, is spirit, but it is not one and the same spirit which is actualized in the act of knowing. The notion of self-consciousness as a reality actualizing itself in thought is alien to the mentioned doctrine, perhaps because it considers self-consciousness and reality to suggest a theologizing philosophy. The spirit of which this philosopher speaks, though it enjoys the title of Absolute with a capital letter, is nothing more nor less (in spite of his contempt for theologizing) than God. His Spirit is an absolute and universal concept, but it is other than reality; it is merely the thought of reality! Such a philosophy in its naïve realism and intellectualism is essentially atheistic and, as Gioberti would have said, leads to the most desperate nihilism.

On the contrary, for modern idealistic philosophy, thought is not something related to reality, it is reality itself. The relation between the knowing subject and the object known is represented in the common mind as if there were the object standing there first and independent of any relation to the subject (always conceived as a particular subject). For philosophy today, on the other hand, the object is the subject itself. The naturalist is one who knows nature, which, in fact, is his own nature. It is a nature found within his experience, arousing his interest, creating his problems. This experience, with the interests and problems it involves, must have already been constructed before any scientific research can be initiated or any consciousness attained. Such consciousness is not to be thought of as a screen of definition which the mind throws over a supposed external nature whose naked light would otherwise dazzle our eyes. Rather it is to be thought of as a new order which thought introduces into itself so that it will come to realize its self-consciousness in this new form.

From this new point of view—the only one capable of withstanding reflective criticism—no distinction of stages of consciousness can be justified. The most childish word, as well as the most elaborate philosophical system, is a moment of self-consciousness containing infinite truth, that is, all the truth that one wishes to know in that moment of self-consciousness. All this involves the same knowing and the same reality known. The system of philosophy is not compared externally with childish babbling, as if two kinds of consciousness were possible, each with its correlative reality. A comparison is made, and the philosopher is able to assess the inferior thought; but he does so from within thought, which is absolutely one, for superior thought contains the inferior and thus rises above and judges it.

Coming back to our celebrated pseudo concepts,[4] it is true that such general concepts as man, dog, plant, noun, verb, adverb, tragedy, satire, are not categories or *a priori* forms. And therefore, critically considered, they are not absolute or necessary to thought and they can be dispensed with. A grammatical, poetical, or rhetorical rule is a historical growth answering to certain ideas and traditions of culture or to certain works judged to be of excellence, but it cannot be held valid as a standard applicable outside those limits. Every poem has its own rules and every discourse its own grammar. But such general concepts are as necessary as are categories of thought whenever their use serves a purpose (and who uses anything without a purpose?). Moreover they have the individuality peculiar to historical knowledge, if history be rightly understood as the history not of a reality which is given, but of the very reality which is brought into being by constructing its history.

To begin with, all definite thoughts are both categories and noncategories. As objects of thought they are not categories, but as functions of the thinking subject they are. All categories, except that of the thinking subject, can be deduced, and therefore constructed; but once constructed they become part of the constitution of the subject and perform the functions of *a priori* forms of thought. So there is one category and there are infinite categories.[5] Their multiplicity is brought to a unity implicit in their nature. Certainly the formation of the concept of tragedy, however vague and hard to define precisely, must have been preceded by many historical experiences. But, once a concept has been formed, in which the thinking subject sums up a certain period of its own development, such a concept becomes an original acquisition in relation to the subsequent historical experiences. For these experiences will be absorbed and evaluated by means of the previous acquisition. This is the eternal process of thought. Every new acquisition enriches the subjectivity of thought. Nothing is lost; everything is stored up.

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[4] We need only consider the origin of this doctrine of the pseudo concepts to see that it is inadmissible in an idealist philosophy. It was in fact suggested by a theory of knowledge adapted to the natural sciences, a theory which emphasized the practical character of such sciences and showed that they really produced not knowledge but devices for utilizing nature. This theory of knowledge arose, as it was bound to do, in the realm of those sciences, which because they deal with nature are all realistic and therefore anti-idealistic. At least this is so as long as the man of science does not attain an idealistic recognition of the identity between the nature he is studying and the thought by which he studies it.

In the second place, it is not true that these categories acquired through experience deprive the particular of its individuality any more than is necessary to perceive it. If I recognize a new work as a tragedy, it does not follow that for this reason I see nothing in it but a general form and miss all the individual traits which make it not *tragedy* but a particular tragedy. The fact is that every judgment, as a judgment of the abstract ego, is a universalization of the particular, though at the same time it is a particularization of the universal; as a judgment of the concrete ego it is a universalization (that is to say a thought) of the individual and at the same time an individualization of thinking (that is to say of the universal).[6] The two terms are inseparable. When they seem to be separated, as in taking the concept of tragedy not for the predicate of particular tragedies but for the subject of abstract definitions, then, in the interest of justice and good sense, we must admit that the facts are not quite what they seem. For in this as in any other case if we lay down what tragedy is or ought to be, in reality we are only laying down what the tragedies from which we formed the concept of tragedy are or ought to be. Aristotle has in mind Aeschylus, and his concept of tragedy corresponds to the analysis of his experience. Of course he will be followed by pedants who will devise rules for shackling poetry yet unborn. But the normative character which, for example, the unities of time and place take on in their pedantic views, does not project itself into the future as a sort of anticipation of some rule implicit in future poetry; rather it represents an analysis, analogous to that performed by Aristotle's own *Poetics*, of the fundamental nature of some ideal tragedy which the pedantic critic has in mind and assumes to be almost written on the same plan as the Promethean trilogy. And is this not equally true of the rules of a normative grammar whether the author has in mind the examples of writers or he, himself, reproduces in an imaginary discourse the period, the phrase, the word to which the rule applies? We have in this case the application of a norm, but such a norm cannot be avoided even in a historical treatment of the subject, unless linguistic expression is treated as a brute mechanical fact devoid of any value.

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[5] See *Sistema di logica*, II.

[6] The particular is the individual conceived abstractly outside the act of thinking. The individual is this same particular, for, in the act of thinking, it is identical with the subject which, through the judgment, objectifies itself and so thinks itself.

There is nothing basically illegitimate, then, in the theory of literary kinds. Such theory is the result of historical experiences developing into categories which thought cannot do without. For it cannot deprive itself of such experiences; and it will always make good use of them, provided that it preserves in them the elasticity necessary to concepts that in history are continually modified along with the whole system of thought to which they belong.

9. *The Concept of Nature and the Problem of Natural Beauty*

From some hints we made in the penultimate section in explaining technique it might be argued that our conception of art classifies nature under technique and so outside the realm of art and beauty. This would simply confirm the sentence pronounced by other modern esthetics, deeply concerned with the spiritual character of art.

But first we must distinguish between nature as conceived by the naturalist (a myth belonging to the abstract ego, where there is neither life nor truth), and nature as conceived by the idealist (the most solid reality there is). It is this latter nature of which we spoke in the Introduction and in the chapter on feeling; a nature that is opposed to thought, precisely because it is in thought. Such nature is identical with the knowing subject that thought discovers within itself as the "being" of which thought is the "becoming." This nature is the body of each of us, the whole body, that is to say the universe. We may call it the whole out of which our particular bodies are carved together with the finite material things that are distinguished from these bodies and grouped in an unlimited and illimitable sphere around them. The body is identified in feeling with the subject and is its very being; it seems to be its particular body, whereas it is but the body of the universe—nature itself. It is the nature in which alone we are born and we live, and to which we are brought back by every thought that seeks certainty of the existence of its object. And it is this familiar nature exactly because it is our familiar body. It is the feeling on which we live and by which we exist, which prevents us from losing ourselves in empty and abstract thought. It is the feeling with which we see and touch ourselves to make sure that we are really here, but above all it is the feeling by which we feel ourselves; and we feel ourselves in it, of course, because it arises in the synthesis of thought. As soon as we try in imagination to stop the labor of thought, we see our life reduced to mere feeling, identical with the physical life which is the life of our body and is also the life of the infinite nature that unfolds before our eyes yet concentrates itself within us. It is within ourselves that we find the powerful and creative energy of this nature throbbing within the seed and then in the trunk and leaves and branches of the trees, growing and blooming and seething in all living things; eternally bringing life out of death and giving everlasting movement to the stars and to the whole which never stops. But why this movement? What is it? It is nothing but the motion which derives thought from feeling and, through thought, solves eternally the problems of life and being.

Feeling becomes conscious of itself in thought. It becomes the ego, which is both beauty and the thought that analyzes beauty and knows it theoretically, thus constructing being in its absolute reality. But nature is mere feeling, below the level of thought. As pure feeling it is an abstraction, for its reality is in thought, in the ego. But in this abstractness, as pure feeling, far from being void of beauty, it is beauty itself. For it is the nature of the spirit, moved by the dialectic of the spirit; it is that feeling *in nuce* that each of us finds within himself so long as he is awake, so long as, to the best of his powers, he exists as thought.

Certainly, so long as thought is understood as something or other going on in the brain or in a soul constricted within the brain or confined within fixed limits, and therefore particular, it is hard to understand how thought, by its synthesis, can encompass all nature and give it life. But such a pitiful concept of the soul is already ruled out for us by the very concept of feeling. For feeling is infinite in its unity, and therefore develops itself in an infinite thought, which can never be a product since, by its nature, it is essentially a process. The infinity of nature is identical with the infinity of feeling which realizes itself in the infinity of thought. So the true infinity of nature is not that falsely imagined by the naturalist as something already given, but rather that which is gradually realized in the development of thought.

10. *The Beauty of Nature*

Beautiful nature is infinite nature; not this or that nature in its particularity, such as a given plant or animal or lake or mountain. Particular nature in its immediate particularity is abstract nature, that of the naturalist.

An anatomical specimen in its materiality cannot be represented artistically. It is not and cannot be the unfolding of a feeling, such as we find in the representation of the whole man of whom this specimen is part. For it is the human figure in its complexity that stands before us as a mirror in which our feeling is reflected.

Thus any single part of nature is an amputated limb, a lump of lifeless matter which cannot arouse in us any feeling. But we need not understand in this materialistic sense the particularity characterizing the parts of the human body or of the body of nature. If we did, no work of art would be possible, for no work of art can contain the whole. The particular does not possess its particularity in itself, but receives it from the spirit which conceives it. If I clasp the hand of a living, vigorous man, who clasps mine in return, what I feel in that hand is his whole being, his soul. If I, on the contrary, clasp the hand of a paralytic, I no longer feel what I felt before; for this is a dead hand, which lacks soul, just as if it had been amputated from the body on which it hangs. Infinity or totality, then, is not to be found in an object materially considered, but rather in the soul. Infinity in fact belongs to feeling. The hand may even be cut off, and we may still see it as the warm, living hand which we have loved and shall love always. A picture may represent "dead nature," but the fruit, though cut from the tree where it grew, represents to us, by its lines and colors, what we always desired and relished in the living fruit. So in a sonnet the universe may be expressed in the sound of a beloved voice, in the shining glance which has made us happy, or the burnished golden hair unbound and flowing in the wind. But for the poet it is still the whole universe that is summed up in the voice, the glance, the hair, making his heart beat as if they were his very life, which is the life of the cosmos. It is enough if the poet finds all of himself, with his own infinity, in the object which re-echoes his feeling.

Nature, therefore, is not beautiful in the parts which reveal themselves one by one to the naturalist, but in the whole which is its infinity; not in its external mechanism, but in the inner soul which is its true essence. The poet who realistically describes nature remains outside her; he never gets beyond that husk which, as Goethe said so well, is no part of nature, since she has no husk. The poet who feels nature within himself can hear her voice in the wind, in the rain, in the thunder, in the howling of dogs on a quiet night; he can see her in the rising and setting sun, in the boundless desert and the green fields, in the vast plain of ocean and the inaccessible summits of the snow-capped hills, in the caverns of the earth and the blazing vault of heaven. Wherever his thought can fix itself and gather up in its synthesis the pulses of his soul, there that soul invades his very thought with its own power and vigor and vitality; and there he finds beauty.

II

Genius, Taste, Criticism

1. *Genius*

Our theory of natural beauty clarifies an idea which, though obscure, neither common sense nor philosophy has ever been able to abandon. It has been expressed in various ways and, since Plato, has always been present in the minds of critics and historians in appraising the achievements of the artistic spirit or the human spirit in general. Since the eighteenth century it has been called genius—a faculty which differs from intelligence or ingeniousness,[a] for neither of these signifies a special function of the spirit but only a high degree of performance in the complex of its functions. During the last century, the question of a proper criterion to distinguish genius from ingeniousness was constantly raised in psychological inquiries; but no scientific conclusion, based on clear principles, logically proved, was ever reached.

Genius belongs to the most honored men—the poets. For they, as the Greek work indicates, are the creators who enrich the world with new forms; and these forms so intertwine and identify themselves with the old that they renew the aspect and the value of the whole. The poets may be called the creators of the spiritual world in which we live. Nature would be felt by men to be a narrow prison if they could not gradually widen its horizons with the creative power of art, which transforms it into something infinite. This is why uncultivated minds instinctively likened the artist to a god and conceived of him as almost an imitator of nature who multiplies its productions.

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[a] *Ingegno:* between "talent," which seems to imply a lower degree of creativeness, "wit," "ingenuity," and "cleverness" (which Carritt had originally used), I felt that "ingeniousness" is a better choice. None of these terms corresponds exactly to the Italian "ingegno."

Hence arises man's gratitude, love, and honor for the poets in the universal sense of the word. For through them and with them he comes into possession of his world. In them he rediscovers himself, not as he is by his own nature and without effort, but as he aspires to be. In them he finds realized the ideal life, in which he delights to advance daily ever further and ever higher, with new emotions—more intense, more exquisite, more vivid. If the light of poetry were extinguished, the world we live in would fall into darkness. We turn with eager hearts to every new work of art that appears above the horizon as if it were the rising sun.

Like honors are paid, to be sure, to the thinker and the man of action. But men are keenly aware of a marked difference between these two kinds of genius and the poet. They see in the poet a sort of privileged spirit set apart from and above themselves. What distinguishes the poet from both the thinker and the man of action is that the two latter demand a special effort of anyone who wishes to rise to the high level where their spiritual world is realized—an effort which often seems to the inexperienced majority to be too harsh and difficult. This effort is thinking; not any kind of thinking, but the thinking whose development requires a great deal of toil, for thought must be elaborated over and over again by anyone who would share in the intellectual life of the thinkers or in the aims of the man of action. The worlds of the thinker and the man of action are constructions. The world of the poet, on the contrary, is the very soul of the constructive principle. It is the feeling which is identical in all men: whether on the royal throne or in the meanest hovel, in the mind of the erudite theologian or in the heart of the pious little woman, in the relations among learned men or in the embrace of lovers, in joy or in pain. No matter if, to reach this fundamental human feeling, we may still have to read books and understand them, and, for that purpose, to study with diligence and to undergo again the effort of thought. No matter if the man without artistic training is led to take an oleograph for a Titian, or the man without literary training is carried away at the theater without grasping the thought of the play. The learning, the thought, the training required may be profound or it may be negligible. When the effort has been made it is like money one has already laid out and thinks of no more. For art does not consist in thought but in that moment when the mind returns to the delight of simple feeling; when the great are small again, and the learned rejoice with the ignorant, and all find themselves men, with a single heart, which is the heart of nature and of the whole. Is poetry not the gift of the ideal childhood of the spirit? Leave your books then, and leave your learning, abandon the laborious technique and the reflection which whitens the hair and wrinkles the forehead! Why all this toil and trouble?[b] Art leads us back to the pure fresh waters of the spring whence life eternally flows.

Certainly the thinker and the man of action are honored and esteemed. But their glory is reflected from the indwelling poetry which animates their thought and therefore their action, and all forms in which the human spirit expresses itself. Every sincere and authentic form the spirit takes on enables us always to feel the power of genius. But what creates and gives us the sense of freshness and youth and, in short, of new life, is always the genius of poetry.

2. *Genius Is Not Thought*

Genius is not thought; it is not art in the old sense in which art is opposed to nature; it is not knowledge, nor science, nor philosophy. Still less is it revelation which breathes into the soul a superhuman knowledge and speaks through man as through an instrument. For art does not obliterate our subjectivity to enthrone in its place an absolutely objective reality. Genius is the mark of an individuality more richly endowed, more energetic and creative, which makes itself the more effective. It is so individual that it cannot be taught or transferred. And so it attracts universal attention and arouses the admiration of all men, who see in it a singular and incommunicable privilege of elect spirits. It is often confused with natural gifts; and it is indeed natural, if nature is conceived of with the precaution we have suggested. Genius in fact shares in the relative immediacy proper to feeling which is the life and reality of nature. It is the very subjectivity of the subject to which nothing can be added or subtracted, for it is incapable of increase or decrease. So, in spite of the close and inseparable connection between feeling and reflection in the synthesis of self-consciousness, there was never any necessity for great skill to bring about the manifestation of genius, nor was such a manifestation ever achieved by rules or teaching. Therefore highly learned writers may leave us cold and inattentive, while the rude work of an uncultured mind may arouse in our hearts a tumult of emotions with his spontaneous poetic power. Even in philosophy and science, even in action itself, the inspiration of genius and the impulse of a gifted personality toward truth are always worth more than the best training and the most critical learning of the schools. It is the young man of science who, through his intuitions, effects at one blow great advances in the discovery of truth; and it is the old scholar who explains and illustrates the discoveries with all the learning and the logical lucidity that can be desired.

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[b] Cf. Wordsworth, *The Tables Turned.*

But it is evident that genius thus understood is no longer the privilege of a few chosen spirits. Genius belongs to all men, although many seem to lose it or stifle it with bad education or with attempts at thoughts or actions disproportionate or incongruous to their native energy. They move among ideas and in a world not their own. Out of place in the spiritual life, they waste the talents they, too, received from God. They waste them, of course, because they have not made them fruitful when they could have done so. Nevertheless, they too live on their talents, and the little they accomplish in life is due to their subjective resources, to the degree of synthesis they are able to realize. For even bad poets, unsuccessful painters and philosophers, and all intellectual misfits, have none the less succeeded in being men and in living their lives, however humble. And to live is to think; and thought implies first of all subjectivity and therefore genius, no matter how small the degree.

3. *Genius Is Nature*

The genius that succeeds, that achieves without failing, and therefore creates, is simply nature; and nature is never misled by the half knowledge which is false knowledge and which so often makes men bungle. Genius is the nature that does not work on things from the outside, as does the man who flatters himself that, with his half science, he can get inside a living being from without and reshape it artificially. Nature knows no rules of art, and genius accomplishes the same miracles as nature, without superfluous devices, without rules and without recipes. It seeks its world not outside but inside itself; or rather it creates its world from within, by an irresistible power similar to that of a luxuriant plant pushing upward and outward from its central stalk in order to occupy space and to draw all it can of the surrounding world into the compass of its own life.

This identity of genius with nature is no mere metaphor but the expression of a pure speculative concept. This is obvious to anyone who has understood the dialectical energy of feeling as being the soul of the body and of thought; or indeed to anyone who has grasped our concept of nature as the reality vibrating spiritually in feeling, as a body but only so far as an infinite body. This inner force of nature eludes the scientific analysis of chemistry and mechanics because, being the effective force of the synthesis, it is always beyond analysis. Its life in fact escapes scientific research, because it transcends the phenomenal sphere within which the scientific inquiries are confined. Yet this life is always present, under our very eyes, and with its inexhaustible power governs and renews all the living forms in which nature incessantly expresses itself. It is identical with the life that seethes within us and warms us and prods us not to remain passive spectators of the world but to take an active part in it, or rather gradually to create a world of our own, in which all of our life unfolds itself.

However, we must not forget that this inner power of nature can be identified with that which develops into thought only on condition that we do not assume it to be a limited force like the one enclosed in the seed of a plant or in the plant itself which is outside us just as it is outside other plants and the rest of the world. Similarly, if I am to conceive of my soul I cannot picture it, as was once imagined, as something sealed up in my particular body. The plant and my particular body are alike products of an abstract analysis which we cannot insist on without falling into the absurdities of a materialistic theory. The power we are speaking of is infinite; and therefore it beats with one pulse in the plant and in man's heart: it is the natural force of genius.

But genius does not imitate nature, for nature is spirit and finds its reality in the spiritual synthesis. It was possible for Plato to speak of imitation, since he distinguished two separate things, or in the end three—ideas, nature, and the human spirit. This distinction allowed Dante to call art a sort of God's child, God being the Idea of ideas. But imitation is a myth, and when we try to understand what it might be it is impossible to give it any definite meaning. Owing in fact to the dualism of model and imitation, we fail to see how the relationship could be possible.[1] The idea of imitation suggests, though still in a rudimentary and inadequate way, the identity of art and nature—an identity not yet exactly understood and therefore reduced to a mere analogy. Such an analogy could be drawn not only between the creative powers but also between the products, so that a portrait would correspond to the living man. This is a denial of the absolute originality of both art and nature. For nature never imitates or repeats itself but always creates new beings, even if children seem to be like their fathers and all individuals of the same species have an undeniable likeness to one another. So too genius, which works through the same creative virtue, is absolutely individual and no form it assumes is ever comparable to any other form. A portrait may very well be the exact likeness of its subject, but such likeness concerns particulars only, which we may, of course, analyze without going beyond them, whereas the esthetic quality of the portrait is only in the synthesis in which the artist's soul is reflected. Without this absolute originality genius would not be a creator and could not insert itself in nature and exercise nature's power.

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[1] For the real substance of this idea of imitation, cf. my *Sommario di pedagogia*, I, pp. 150–152 (Bari: Laterza, 1913).

4. *Ingeniousness*

Ingeniousness, which is analysis and abstract thought, theory without practice, mere intellectuality, is to be most carefully distinguished from genius, which is synthesis and creation. The ingenious man is not creative either in theory or in practice, because he concentrates on the analytical details of a thought which does not recognize itself in its object but rather thinks of that object as opposed to the subject, that is, as abstract thought. Not that his thought is pure analysis, for that would be impossible; but it leans in that direction. Not that he fails to produce or create at all, but his products and creations tend to remain mere abstractions in which life is mirrored from a distance without any compelling motive. Since the man endowed with ingeniousness (but not genius) never forgets himself in his object, he has not enough subjective energy to feel himself perpetually committed in the world or to feel this world to be nonexistent without him. He looks upon himself as a spectator, or at best as one whose only part is to conform to the world to consider things and their aspects minutely, as problems to be solved one by one. And the problems are many because reality, when seen from the outside by a mere spectator, is broken up and divided into parts and particles and facets to infinity. The man who knows reality without participating from within, in its life and in its continual creation of new forms, can only perceive it as an infinite multiplicity of details. His analysis of it exhibits clearness of thought, knowledge of technique and theory, learning and keenness of intelligence which uncovers the smallest points and the aspects least noticeable; he offers a perfect description of it with the acuteness and the smile of the observer who, feeling himself to be outside things, passes on them lightly, with an indifferent smile. But this does not show profundity of thought, or warmth of inspiration, or any of that power which ravishes and masters our minds lifting them to the vision of a superior world. Ingeniousness belongs to exegetes, genius to creators. The ingenious man does not aspire to originality, because for him things already exist and his task is to know things which already exist, for he is longing for a world still to be born and which he will create. In his longing he neglects particulars, he has no eyes for parts; he is intent upon the whole, the synthesis of elements, the living being. He is obscure because of his depth and gives as much matter for study to his commentators as nature does to its busy researchers.

Ingeniousness is the source of the little virtues of science and life, necessary too, but futile when departing from the great faith, the robust temper, the strong humanity of genius, which creates the world where the little virtues can play their useful part. Ingeniousness is the mason; genius, the architect. Both are necessary. Concrete art is that synthesis of thought, where the subject is self-conscious.

5. *Taste*

But what greatly interests the esthetician is the concept of taste as the faculty which makes possible the perception of the artistic element in a work of art. Without taste there would be neither criticism nor history of art. Indeed, there would be no art; for art is only possible so long as the spiritual reality in which art is realized exercises a vigilant control upon itself through the freedom that is essential, as we have seen, to the subjective life of the spirit itself.

The beauty of a work of art is a universal value which pervades not only the spirit of its maker but every spirit that comes into relation or communication with him and so shares the creative activity resulting in the value of art. This observation led to the postulation of the identity of the act of creation with the act of criticism. The author who creates a beautiful work of art and the man who succeeds in appreciating its beauty both participate in the same act, which implies the identity of genius and taste.

But this implication has remained in contemporary esthetics a mystical aspiration rather than a philosophical concept. It could not really become a true concept, because the relation between taste and genius was investigated from a purely empirical or arbitrary point of view. Such a point of view places the creative artist and the man of taste side by side like two men playing different parts; and soon we discover, whether we like it or not, that actually they are really playing the same part. But once this relation was seen from the proper point of view, it became easier to realize that it was in reality an identity and to know the nature of the identity.

The truth is that the philosophical problems of the spirit cannot receive their final solution on the empirical basis of a multiplicity of spirits. For the present position of philosophy, which every idealist must now accept, is that the spirit is free because it is infinite; and this cannot be true of the particular spirit presented in the phenomenology of experience. Thus, either there is no such thing as taste or, if there is, it does not arise outside the author's spirit, when the work has been completed, as if genius were on one side and taste on the other.

In fact genius itself is inconceivable without taste. For taste is the judgment which is perception and evaluation; beauty cannot be perceived without distinguishing it from its opposite. Indeed feeling, in which we have discovered the principle of beauty, is not absolute immediacy; it is dialectic, free dialectic, choice. It posits itself by excluding its opposite. So feeling that does not succeed in rising above pure objectivity (which is the non-being of feeling), but remains oppressed and negated by it, experiences an uneasiness which is only relieved when it grows out of this entanglement and erects itself in its free subjective being. To do this is to distinguish concretely between beauty and ugliness, and to observe beauty in its birth and manifestation. And this is taste.

Taste then is genius itself in its dialectic. The man of taste is the man of genius, and therefore shares in the genius of the artist just so far as he shares in his taste.

6. *Criticism and Translation*

Criticism is taste; but it is something more, for when taste is brought to that stage of spiritual life where it exercises its function, it has the same abstractness as pure art. Criticism, on the contrary, is thought and therefore philosophy, and therefore history. Criticism is the concrete actualization of thought conscious of itself, in which art is found and given its place. Without criticism, however inadequate and clumsy, we might have a Dante but we would not be aware of him; or we might be aware and take note of him as we retain in our memory the date of a thunderbolt or an earthquake. Dante's nature and his place and importance in history are things we learn only through criticism.

The function of criticism is to discover art through the work of art. It must not stop at what the work tells us literally. To explain the *Divine Comedy* in its plot and structure is a part of criticism, but it is not criticism. The material subject matter of the poem is not the poem; nor are the words which express that subject matter. They are written and printed in a book that everyone can read. But will it do to read them as they are set before us one after the other, each one like an independent cell? Words must be interpreted; from the words, which are many, we must ascend to the soul, which is one. In short, we must understand them.

Perhaps the reader of the Italian poem may not be Italian. Then, to understand the words, he must first translate them. Translate? But is it possible to translate a work of art? We can translate neither a work of art nor a scientific work without losing something, although the loss in the latter may be less than in the former. For language is feeling inasmuch as it has been, like all technique, fused in feeling and made one with it; and this is the essentially artistic element in the work of art. Therefore, to substitute one language for another language is to substitute one feeling for another and to take from one work of art a cue for constructing another. But even if the reader is Italian and speaks the very language of the poet, we cannot say that his language is exactly the same as that of the poet. Every writer has his own language, his own words, all sounding with his own accent, inspired by his soul, and forming a body in which every organ is correlative to all the rest. Every word has its sense in the context, and the context is a particular, unique discourse which can never be repeated. The linguist, in fact, feels the presence of as many vocabularies as there are writers in whom the language is studied. Can we not distinguish different periods even in the same writer? And, if we want to be more precise, can we say that the words now on our lips have the same accent as last year's words or even yesterday's? An Italian reader, too, must translate into his own language (the language he speaks today!) a poem written by another Italian seven centuries ago. In addition, all of us must translate the words we ourselves wrote yesterday.[2]

The alleged loss of meaning (if loss it be) in translating a work of art is under any circumstances inevitable. If feeling can only come to us through the words and the words keep changing, feeling is bound to change with them. And it is in feeling that we seek the work of art and its essentially artistic element. The supposed object of criticism (an object to which criticism ought to do justice) does not exist; nor does history if its object is presupposed. The immortal life of beautiful things is always life. It is never a halt; it is a continual motion and unceasing rebirth of the spirit in which and for which it lives.

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[2] See my "Torto e diritto delle traduzioni" (1920), in *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1921), pp. 367–376. The criticism of my remarks by Croce (*Critica*, 1921) may serve to exhibit the disastrous influence exercised on his whole thought by the intellectualist and realist tendency of his philosophy. Having adopted in his *Teoria della storiografia* my doctrine of the contemporaneousness of all history, he should have escaped the obsession of an esthetic reality outside the subject, and of anything enclosed and sealed in the past.

But the right to translate rests on even more solid ground than the principle that translation is universal and inevitable in art. Translation, in a sense, is a change and a movement toward diversity; in another sense it is the completion of the circle by a return from diversity to identity. Translation, if we want to be more precise, is not something supervening after all is over, when the expression has been completed, when the poet has recited his song and is silent and dead, and his song has been passed on to others; but it is something born in the original act of expression itself and it develops step by step as the poet proceeds in the development of his theme by a progressive treatment of his fundamental motive. Dante does not stop at his first triplet, nor at his first canto, nor at his first canticle. These are all stages, overcome one by one, while the poet continues to go on. And at every point in this process, what has already been expressed, being incomplete, must be completed, and in being developed and completed is transformed, fulfilled, and transfigured. Every word already pronounced takes on a new life and a deeper meaning. It is no longer the word it was but a new one. It has been translated into another language.

If we overlook this primary self-translation of poetry and every work of art in the very process of its creation, we shall never understand the spiritual nature of such a creation. But if we recognize that every translation is only a further development of this original self-translation, we shall no longer fear that it may result in the loss or deterioration of the work of art, or the substitution of one work for another. Without this intrinsic and congenital process of translation there could be no actual living work of art: art would evaporate in a void that could not be expressed. This would be a supposition logically absurd, for there is no thesis without antithesis and synthesis! In good translation art does not lose, it gains; instead of losing itself, it gains itself. The development of language is not the death but the life of feeling, for language is not mere analysis; it permeates the synthesis.

There are, of course, failures in art, when the spirit is sidetracked and loses itself in analysis. But the true work of art is one which, through the multiplicity of language (of every word, every thought, every technical device), gives us the unity of the artist's personality and communicates to us his feeling. And this can be done because in feeling we are all of one soul; what divides us is thought so far as it has not yet risen above the stage of abstract analysis.

We must read and reread, translate and retranslate, weigh every word, look at it in itself and in its context, examine every element in its own nature and in its effect upon the whole (meter, rhythm, characters, historical events, legends, superstitions, religious and philosophical ideas, nature imagery); we must, in short, interpret by every means in our power, until the scattered parts come together again in a united body which lives its own life and makes us feel that all of its existence is born of that life and fused with it. If we can do this we shall discover and understand the beauty of a work of art; we shall discover the central point from which glows all the light that irradiates the body of the work in every part and makes it shine with absolute transparency. This is true criticism.

7. *The Three Stages of Criticism*

Art criticism is, in the first place, the assimilation of technique or of the content of the work of art. It is tracing back the road traveled by the artist and animating with our own feeling the subject matter in which he expressed himself. It is going back, from the multiplicity of the expressive means, which followed one another on that road, to the original unity, from the words to the feeling that inspired them. As long as criticism dwells on the meaning of the words and the precise significance of the thought into which the artist's subjectivity constructed itself in the form of a story or of a system of ideas, as long as it examines the particular characteristics of the style and the school to which the artist belongs and consequently the technique by which he was accustomed to express himself, it is a preparation for the critical judgment but not yet the pronouncement of it. In this preliminary stage criticism is no more than history; it interprets the documents of art using all the means which may facilitate such an interpretation. It is the history of the outer life of the artist and of his spiritual development and therefore the history of the ideas in which he grew up, and of the customs and institutions and social conditions in which his personality was formed. It is the history of the artistic antecedents of the work we are studying through the development of the individual artist and of the artistic movement of which he was a part. It is the history of his technique, strictly speaking, and of the language spoken in his own time and before him, which he adapted to his own ways of feeling both in his earlier and later works; and so on. All these elements put us in touch with the personality of the artist, with whom the critic wants to communicate. They clearly show the path walked by the artist in his creative process. The artist too, as we have seen, must assimilate his subject matter and acquire complete mastery of his technique, so that when he sings or paints he will be translating into objective images (into self-consciousness) only his own feeling, with which everything else has been fused and identified. When he has succeeded in dissolving the world into his own subjective feeling, then he can express it, reproducing all that he has absorbed, and analyzing in the light of consciousness what is obscure and formless—mere feeling. Through historical research the critic must be capable of interpreting and thinking the work of art, which is its author's thought, in such a way that this thought no longer stands before him as something objective, but is identified with his *self* and with the feeling which gave it life—the pure feeling which is the true and essential art of the work and the hidden source of its beauty. Only then can he enter into the state of grace, as we may call it, of the artist, where all the creative forces of life are fervently and tumultuously at work. No longer does he reason or coldly analyze, for to enter into that state of grace is to reach the heart of nature and to feel the warmth of its creative energy. Here there is no analysis, there is only synthesis. The stage of discursive argument where it was permissible to note resemblances, to debate with other critics, to raise philosophical questions or to reconstruct history has been outgrown. It is no longer the time for reasoning or learning. All the necessary learning, researching, and proving have been done. We have come into possession of our world; it has become blood of our blood, identified with us and with the feeling in which our being is rooted. Nothing concerns or bothers us any more. In the joy of the infinite power we have achieved we are no longer face to face with the artist, but we have overcome every distinction which prevented our identity with him. We have restored within ourselves that profound humanity which is also his—the humanity by which every man who speaks to us with emotion and moves us is our brother, for he transports us to a point where we feel that we all have the same father and the same heart and the same eyes and see the same world around us.

Exactly so: we have the same eyes and the same world. The moment we enter into the poet's feeling, the infinite world which was his re-emerges in every detail—a warm, lively, logical, luminous world; a world of beauty animated by the poet's spirit. Then, if the critic has really identified himself with that feeling and absorbed himself in that state of grace which precludes all distractions and irrelevancies, he finds in himself the very creative power of the poet. He sees the poet's world rise again before his eyes, summoned by the magic power of his own mind, and he reaches the third and final stage of his task—the exposition of the work of art, not in a prosaic summary, or in an analytical explanation, but in a moving creation. The content of the work, which he had already assimilated, now reappears, but it is no longer that dull, abstract content which we see without emotion, or feel, as Campanella said, without enjoyment as if the hand that touched it belonged to another. It is the concrete content deeply permeated by feeling.

There are, then, the three stages of criticism: the assimilation of the abstract content, the judgment of taste, and the reconstruction of the concrete content.

8. *The Subjective and Objective Character of Criticism and of Historical Reconstruction in General*

It is hardly necessary to remark that this reconstruction is essentially a new construction. To compare the critical reconstruction of a work of art (which may even take the form of a translation) with its original is as impossible as to compare the thought of a thing with the thing itself, although the realist disagrees with this. All realism is absurd. The work of art finds its actual existence only in criticism, just as the object finds its abode in the thought that thinks it. Those who try to confront a given thought with the object it refers to, only succeed in confronting it with another thought which they have reason to consider more precise. There is no alternative. If they are unable to see the solid basis that thought has within themselves they are inevitably condemned to hopeless skepticism.

The work of art, as it presents itself prior to the investigation of criticism, is merely a document for criticism; it is just what a monument or an inscription of relevant facts is for history. The document in itself is not history. The work of art comes before us as a book, a painted canvas, a bronze or marble statue. And in this outward, material form, it remains an indispensable point of reference for the research that thought will undertake in order to understand the work of which the book or canvas or bronze stand as evidence. This material evidence is indispensable because only by starting from it and returning to it are we able to conduct the inquiries which lead us to the conception of a given historical work of art.

It is only to the superficial observer that subjective historical construction seems, like the soothsayers of Dante's *Inferno*,[c]

[c] XX, 7.

to have its face turned backwards, toward the past. There is no past which is not reconstructed by the historian's own thought. The subjectivity of historical construction does not imply any arbitrariness, simply because the constructing thought has and must have reasons of its own for every detail of its construction. And a document whose authenticity is proved and incontestable is one of the strongest bases on which actual thought can erect its edifice. For this thought finds in itself, that is to say in its own system of ideas, the document which it employs together with the proofs of its authenticity; it finds tradition and the system of fundamental truths on which the realist naïvely relies to build the edifice of history. But the realist is not aware that these alleged foundations would crumble under destructive criticism, were they not propped up by a critical defense which in fact must itself continually construct and reconstruct them.

In conclusion, the only thing falsified or altered by criticism or by any translation is that purely fictitious work of art, supposed to be real by realistic theory. The truth is that criticism gives historical and continuous consistency to the immortal life of the spirit, which is the only concrete work of art we can speak of.

9. *The History of Art*

The history of art is art criticism. After what we have said, it would be unnecessary to remark that the history of art is not the same thing as history. Every historian should keep in mind this distinction. History is self-consciousness, that is, philosophy itself, since by philosophy we understand the fulfillment of thought through the synthesis of subject and object, theory and practice, in their identity. Art is only one aspect of history, for it is only a stage in the spiritual synthesis. The content, which from the point of view of art is technique, has a value of its own—dissolved and obliterated in the work of the spirit regarded as a pure work of art.

But to say that it is obliterated does not imply that it must not be taken into consideration. The conclusions drawn, in the most recent theory of art criticism, from a misunderstood concept of the individuality of art, are gross errors which must be swept away. According to this theory the history of art has no unity, but is split up into an infinite number of individualities each living in a particular work of art which has no relation to any other. We have Dante, Ariosto, Leopardi, but there is no such thing as Italian literature; Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, but no sixteenth-century Italian painting; and so on. The scientific form of art history, such as this esthetics would have it, consists in essays, character sketches, portraits, and monographs. The tissue which, in current histories of literature, painting, and the like, connects these individual works is asserted to be extrinsic and heterogeneous; it is not the history of art but of culture and, strictly speaking, of thought or philosophy. The artist himself is obliterated by this sort of triturating, dissolvent, critical analysis; there is no artist, but the series of artistic problems which he set himself during his life and managed to solve in his various works; not even the single work of art survives in its integrity. The *Divine Comedy?* That too must be resolved into its elements. Besides poetry there is in it an allegory, a theological and philosophical system, practical concerns, and all sorts of other things that are not poetry.

But in the first place, individuality is not particularity. The individuality of art is not the individuality of self-consciousness but is its starting point; and it does not exclude the universality which unfolds in thought; rather it contains the essence of that universality, namely infinity. Thus art, like philosophy, leaves nothing outside itself; everything is art so far as it is feeling. Consequently, everything is reflected in every work of art.

In the second place, art is purely abstract art, is a mere subjective ideal which has no concrete existence and cannot possibly be grasped and treated as material for criticism or history. Art is the form of a content; it is the feeling which only has concrete existence as the subject of a certain world; it is the feeling of a personality which, being both body and thought, includes everything in itself. Unless feeling received definite individuality from the subject matter which it absorbs and expresses, it would remain an abstract and lifeless unity. Its life is in the rhythm or circle of the spiritual synthesis in which it becomes a definite concrete feeling and therefore a definite personality—Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Goethe, Manzoni. It is the feeling of a definite world, and such a world is self-consciousness, conscious thought, philosophy. And evidently the history of this philosophy becomes one with the history of art. For in the history of art, if you drive philosophy out of doors, it flies back through the window, despite all the programs and prejudices of theory. Thrust into the background, it allows the lights to be concentrated on the figures of art which stand out against it; thrust down into the valleys, it gives elevation to the lofty mountains on whose summits shines the light of subjective feeling. To want a mountain without valleys is absurd. They are not its accidental surroundings but its necessary complement.

The history of art, which is also the criticism of art, must rise above the content, but in order to rise above it, it must get inside it. So history is the history of thought; it may be constructed or considered with an artistic interest, emphasizing the feelings which from time to time burst into the development of the spirit to give it fresh life and courage; but it is always one and the same history, the only reality that there is.

III

Art as Liberator

1. *The Delight and the Defect of Art*

Ever since Aristotle[a] outlined his conception of *catharsis* proper to tragedy, esthetics has always dealt with it as one of the secrets of art, as something hard to understand but unmistakably verified in experience. For closely connected with this Aristotelian conception of catharsis as a specific property of tragic poetry is the conception, no less celebrated in classical poetics, of *pleasure* as the generic property of poetry as a whole. But if the aim of tragedy, intrinsic in its structure, is liberation from the pain which it arouses and intensifies, and if liberation from pain is precisely the pleasure in which feeling realizes itself, then tragedy performs the function of all poetry—it provides pleasure and delight.

This pleasure has been condemned by modern esthetics of spiritualistic tendency as a mark of the hedonism distinctive of ancient esthetics. But it can be reinterpreted, if our doctrine of feeling is accepted, as a stage of spiritual activity, and can be identified with feeling, which is the essence of art.

We must recognize that there was some truth in the minds of both the lovers of art, who thought to exalt it by assigning pleasure as its aim, and of their opponents (mystics of the middle ages and other times), who thought either to degrade it by such a meretricious function or to justify it by making it an instrument for inculcating moral and religious truths through an agreeable medium. The champions of art were trying, though still in a vague and unsatisfactory way, to define its essential nature, which is pleasure and "the source of every joy." The enemies of art were directing their attention to the deficiency of the purely subjective stage of art, from the point of view of the complete synthesis of the spirit. And they were right in doing so, for they were dominated by the idea of God, who is pure objective reality, the very opposite of feeling. In feeling, the subject is confined to itself and finds nothing standing against it, since it leavens everything with the force of its inner life and assimilates and dissolves all into an identity with itself. Its immediacy is a virtual denial of God, although it is sustained by a passionate mysticism, a mysticism lived, not thought.

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[a] *Poetica*, VI. Cf. *Politics*, V (viii), 5.

Self-conscious mysticism, on the other hand, is the self-annihilation of the thinking subject, which throws its whole self into an object which is infinite because there is nothing else. In this object it imprisons itself or, to use the traditional expression of mystics, dissolves itself, thus becoming nothing but the pure object. But it is a power which crushes and exalts men; it is both the law and the will obeying this law, both truth and the intellect which truth illuminates; it is all that man aspires to and all that he finds reflected in himself. The artist (artistic subjectivity) on the contrary, is an outlaw, since, as pure subject, he is an atheist. He has truth, but a truth of his own, and so he is a skeptic. He is the individualist not yet tamed by the fear of God, which is *initium sapientiae*. He is a child who knows no needs but those he feels, and so he is an egoist, who must be educated and made a man. He feels pleasure but not yet reason; and he must become rational by recognizing God and all else opposing and limiting him. He is a barbarian who does not yet know the laws of civilized life with its limitations, its sacrifices, its duties.

Mystics have carried on a polemic against art because the human spirit itself has an eternal polemic against it. Religion is by its own nature opposed to art, just as art is to religion. But besides war, there is peace between them; besides their opposition, there is their union. Philosophy is the peacemaker.

2. *Catharsis*

Esthetic catharsis frees the soul in two senses; in the particular and limited sense of liberation from the pain inherent in the single work of art, and in the universal sense of liberation from the pain of life.

Aristotle's purgation refers to the pain peculiar to the drama, which makes the spectators share the suffering of the hero who is struck down by Fate and thrown into undeserved misfortune. It is hard to see how Aristotle thought that tragedy could perform this miraculous purgation of the soul while directing its efforts to the lively presentation of suffering. One might surmise that he had some dim idea of the overcoming of passion by the thought which objectifies it. Perhaps it is more likely that he did not intend to explain a fact which he had acutely observed in experience. At any rate he thought purgation to be peculiar to tragedy and he did not suspect that it might also have a place in comedy and in every other technical form of poetry. For he did not realize that pain and pleasure, or purgation, are not peculiar to the plot or to any particular structure of thought in which feeling is expressed or, in short, to the technique which distinguishes tragedy from other kinds of poetry, but that they are peculiar to feeling itself. For Aristotle the suffering in a tragedy is in the painful facts represented; for us it is in the feeling which finds its expression in those facts.

But once we have transferred the pain from the object to the subject, we have to admit that the tragic quality, while prominent in certain forms of poetry, is common to all poetry, being simply the return to pure subjectivity. And pure subjectivity is pleasure; but a pleasure that negates itself in the thought in which it is represented, thus becoming pain. The pleasure is only regained and firmly possessed through the return of the subject to itself in the circle of its rhythmic process.

The subject matter of the tragedy is identified with feeling when such a feeling, which has inspired the tragedy, has been fused and absorbed in it. And feeling is pleasure, although it is given a definite and individual form as something painful—painful because it consists in the representation of man, of humanity itself (which is the poet's humanity), as limited and oppressed. This pleasure always ends in thought; and all thought is effort, toil, sweat, and exhaustion of that natural, instinctive life which constitutes the subject. It is renunciation and self-sacrifice (*multum sudavit et alsit*).[b] Whether this thought is of a friendly or hostile reality, of a tragic or serene world, of a world that, the moment we think it, promises to favor our life and foster our happiness or threatens the destruction of the liberty by which we live, it is nonetheless always thought, and therefore toil and sorrow. If for a moment we picture a delightful garden, thought soon warns us that every flower we pick in it is full of thorns and that it will begin to wither and fall while our hands and hearts go out to it; that all living things die, even as we look at them; that every fountain, where we must drink in order to live, dries up; that all of life is a toilsome journey without a goal where man can stop and rest at the end of the day.

There is comfort for these pains, and it comes to those who think. But we cannot think, we cannot open our eyes without sinking into a flood of sorrow from which we must struggle to the shore. And it cannot be otherwise, for thought is not intuition or immediate self-revelation. It is a process; this implies that we are always journeying and always arriving, yet never arriving. We *are* only insofar as we *are not;* and we suffer. The world fills itself with hostile and frightening phantoms; at every step we come to impassable barriers. Such is life even for the least tragic-minded. If we turn to comedy, what do we get? A superficial laugh.

So it is. What difficulties a writer encounters and overcomes

[b] Horace, *Ars poetica*, 412: "He who would stand the course to his ambition's goal must have trained hard from boyhood, must have borne heat and cold."

with repeated efforts! What cares continually beset him from the beginning, from the day he took up his pen and sketched out his work! His mind is always fixed on the end, that is, on the whole, on the work dreamed of but not yet realized, the work still to be achieved. What a joy for Manzoni to watch with a detached and sovereign mind, his characters move in the world he had created for them, and to follow, with a smiling eye, their movements in a solid, serene world brightened by faith, and even to observe their failings and their comic weaknesses! Yet when the *Betrothed* was finished he was still dissatisfied. So much work done, so much still to be done; so many years full of toil ahead of him; so much time and work still to go through, which stood inescapably before him as inexorable as Fate in ancient tragedy. Creation is joy in the end, but its process of realization is pain like a woman's labor.

This is the inherent pain of thought, from which there would be no rest without the soothing effect of art. When a circle of thought is concluded and closed with the seal of feeling, the thinking subject erects itself aloft in its infinity and liberty. Then man feels the joy of life and the pride of power. In this return of the subject to itself lies the catharsis of all poetry and of all art.

3. *The Consolation of Art*

But since the synthesis in which art is realized is also the synthesis which rises above art and gives us the concrete whole of the spirit, that is, of the world, the pain from which art liberates us is not merely the pain arising and developing within the single work of art. Such pain is incidental and may well be avoided by men—it may be avoided by the practical man immersed in the thought by which he constructs a reality where he can more easily live and achieve his purposes; it may be avoided by the man of science, always striving after a conception of the objective world in which feeling is stilled by the vision of universal necessity; it may be avoided most of all by the philosopher who, in the clearer light of self-consciousness, grasps subject and object in their well-balanced unity and assures himself that no barrier can limit or thwart human liberty or crush the power in which all happiness lies. What then attracts the businessman or anyone engaged all day in the interests and passions of industry or commerce or politics to the theater where a tragedy or comedy has been announced for the evening? What interest can move this man who is accustomed to weigh all interests cooly? What draws men who have worked hard all week to visit museums and art galleries which are no places of rest but of study and new effort?

Art is a refuge and an escape for all from the hard laws of real life and from the struggles through which life gradually develops. The reality in which we have to live presents itself, at a superficial glance, as a huge machine where each man is but a little wheel connected to the gear that moves it and keeps it turning perpetually. His hopes last for a short time, then lead him to bitter disappointment; high purposes may swell his heart in the vision of a better world, but sooner or later they are all shipwrecked on the hard reefs of some insurmountable barrier. Daring youth advances in life with blind faith in the future, but behind life is the ghastly grin of death. Shall we rebel against these laws? The forces of the vast machine grind to powder everything that would resist the movement of its wheels. On more mature reflection, no doubt, the machine is seen for what it is—an empty bugbear; but other laws appear behind those of mechanics, laws no less harsh and rigid for those who would ignore or violate them. The laws of the spirit are the laws of freedom; but freedom means activity and progress, not rest or attainment. There are always new obstacles and, when they are overcome, they arise in new forms. Victory never allows us to rest on our laurels. From morning to evening there are always new problems to solve; we must watch and work and think without ceasing. So we weave the web of reality where all things are ordered and inseparably bound together in their order. Everything has its place, and merely in keeping watch on reality there is the continual effort to hold before us this systematic order and not to let any detail escape us. The hundred eyes of Argus[c] and the hundred arms of Briareus[d] would not allow us to advance without stumbling and falling and being entangled in the system.

What can break through this hard and fast system of experience whose web encloses us on every side? Art. For art, as pure subjectivity, brings back man's self-consciousness from the circumference to the center, where everything is gathered up and concentrated at a single point—the creative subject. Even dreams, as we have seen, release the spirit from the total system of experience and permit it to expatiate in its own freedom. But in dreams the subject does not feel its infinity, and so it submits itself to things, which appear as a stern and inevitable reality independent of the activity of the spirit. In dreams, therefore, there may be suffering, pain, and all the horrors of a nightmare. In art, on the contrary, the subject feels its infinity and so rejoices in its infinite liberty. This is the true world of the spirit, where the spirit is at home with itself. This is of course an ideal stage; and it will be followed by a new synthesis, since art is followed by criticism which will bring us down once more from imagination to reality. Then the spirit will become conscious of itself again in a new thought, in a renewed system of its experience; the charm will be broken and life will settle down again in the solid structure of its laws.

From this point of view we might say that life is a tragedy, in which man is subject to Fate. But this universal tragedy has also its own catharsis, which is art, the eternal source of youth from which constantly springs and sparkles the magic water that makes life flow again in the dry reeds burned by the fires of thought.

And art, of course, is not confined to professional and recognized artists, but it belongs to all men; it belongs to the spirit and to our mother nature, which is nowhere but in our own mind—the mother nature to which we always turn to seek strength and comfort, which supports us under the worst troubles, putting into our hearts a faith that to reason seems blind, and a will to live that to abstract philosophy is foolishness. This nature is the deep feeling that constitutes our innermost self, from where we eternally rise to self-consciousness; it is the basis for every construction which gradually goes to build up this world of ours. And here we come to the root of all certainty, which enables us to live with open eyes and forbids the suspicion that has been so often raised by inefficient philosophies in simple minds which were easy prey to doubt and paradox—the suspicion that all we see may be a web of false and empty images, or of cunningly contrived categories devised by us and void of foundation.

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[c] In Greek mythology a giant with one hundred eyes, fifty of which were always kept open.

[d] A giant with fifty heads and one hundred arms.

4. *The Universality of the Cathartic Function of Art*

But, lest this cathartic function of art should lead to serious misunderstandings and prejudice, we must call to mind the universal character which our theory gives to art. The mere mention here of the identity we have proved between art and infinite nature should be enough to open our eyes. But it may be useful also to notice that the supreme consolation, deriving from nature and therefore from art, is not only to be found in so-called works of art but in every work of the spirit and in every form of life, speculative and practical.

The point of view which the spirit adopts exclusively in art is also found, in every product and stage of concrete spiritual reality, as one element in the synthesis that realizes this spiritual life. No living person can quite forget and lose himself in the analytical thought which breaks up the objective world into disconnected fragments. No slave has so sacrificed his subjective freedom as not to find some grain of joy in the life to which he has degraded himself. Only when the individual has utterly despaired of himself and the world, only when he is convinced of the sheer vanity of every effort to solve the problems of his life, only then does he give way to that self-negation which is the last act of life and liberty, that is, suicide. But unless a man commits suicide and destroys his life (only in the relative sense which these words can properly bear), what can his life be if not a synthesis in which there is no object without a subject which in turn finds itself again in the object? Whatever may be the difference between the subject and the object (a difference felt by the subject as the otherness through which its fundamental identity is realized), there is no consciousness of difference without a consciousness of identity. For self-consciousness, which is the essence of reality, consists precisely in this simultaneous identity and diversity. In the equilibrium of the synthesis the artistic element or subjective stage is tempered by the religious element or objective stage. But, in order to be tempered, it must survive; and it survives as the soul of the life or synthesis itself. The joy of art may spread and expand into peaceful fields of thought. However, austere as the peace of thought may seem, it is always stirred by moments of inner joy as the thinking subject comes into possession of itself in taking firm possession of the truth. The act of thinking may move away from itself and fix its attention on the abstract thought; but this must still be the abstract thought to which it has given birth. The abstractness of such a thought, far from proving its absence, attests to its presence and its power.

All life, all reality, is the laborious and painful process of thought, which is the actualization of the spirit. But the spirit, rightly understood, is the spirit of nature, the nature which is always present to guide our labors, to lift up our hearts, to quicken and vivify inert matter by forcing on it life, which is motion and therefore a constant passage from non-being to being. It is the spear which eternally wounds, then heals the wound it has inflicted.

5. *The Consolation of Religion*

The ancient observation (which has lost none of its truth) that religion also consoles and recreates man's spiritual powers is no serious objection to our conception of catharsis as the essential function of art. But to understand how this observation may readily be reconciled with the doctrine here set out, we must first clear up the meaning of the conflict between art and religion as presented in our theory. It might be thought that such a conflict was disproved by the innumerable instances in which religion supplies the subject matter of art. And these instances are so obvious that they do not escape anyone's attention. It is not surprising, then, that they have been used as conclusive arguments by the opponents of atheistic art and the related idea of the nonesthetic nature of religion.

The art and the religion thus opposed to each other are not two historical facts or, in our language, two concrete spiritual realities. They are two stages of the act through which the life of the spirit is realized in history. And it is always inadmissible to pass from a purely abstract element to historical reality, unless we are very careful to notice that such an abstract element has value only so long as, within the historical reality, our attention is confined to it. If we want to find the artistic essence of a work of art we must take that work in all its complexity, as it stands before us in its definite historical reality. For in such historical reality the artistic element is combined with various others in the concrete synthesis from which we can detach it only in the abstract. There is always present in the synthesis that element which is the direct antithesis of art—the objective element of self-consciousness, that is, the object which is not the subject, and whose being is therefore the negation of the subject's being. This is the religious element. Art and religion always go together, because one is the negation of the other. Their inseparable unity constitutes the concrete reality of the spirit, which is a dialectical process or identity of being and non-being. Is not this the whole meaning of the spiritual synthesis? The fact that religion goes hand in hand with art does not prove, however, that they are kindred; this necessary connection between them proves rather their reciprocal opposition, in virtue of which art excludes religion, and conversely.

The thought which in the present study we have opposed to feeling is abstract thought, that is, the negation of pure subjectivity. As absolute negation of the subject, it is absolute objectivity; as relative negation, it is relative objectivity, in relation to which the subject has and yet has not a place. It has a place so far as the object acquires determinations which are the result of the subject's thinking activity; it has no place so far as the subject opposes itself to the object thus determined and overlooks the subjective source of the object's determinations. The object as absolute negation of the thinking subject is God—the Infinite as an object. The object as relative negation is the object of natural science, which, by a process obviously parallel to that of religion, takes the object fashioned by scientific thought to be a thing in itself.

But, whether in religion or science, the dialectic of the spirit allows for an esthetic point of view. For, as we have seen, abstract thought has a place in the rhythm of the spiritual life, not only subsequent but also previous to feeling. Religion, like science and like every determination the subject acquires in the process of self-objectification, can only manifest itself after going through feeling and identifying itself with the subject. For the subject cannot mirror itself in any object other than that which is the objectification of the subject itself; thought is nothing but self-consciousness. The subject derives from itself all that comes to light through thought. So religion cannot depart from feeling, for religion, as the opposite of feeling, has posited itself as something other than feeling and has fused itself in its opposite. The result is no longer God, but our love of God; no longer the reality studied by science, but our feeling for that reality. The opposition between the subject and the object, which hindered the subject, is broken down. So the subject finds itself free, infinitely free, alone with itself, without any other that could oppose its activity, and above all without that supreme reality, infinite and absolute, which fills it with the sense of its own nothingness. The master has become the slave, and the slave has chained the master to his own fetters. From the artistic point of view religion is invisible. In the *Last Judgment* we see God, but the creator is Michelangelo.

In this dialectic we can still find sense in saying that religion comforts and lifts up the human mind. So, in their ways, do science and philosophy and thought in general. Religion in its own way gives us the certainty of an infinite Reality on which all things depend and in which our minds find a solid support against doubts and fears. But this very certainty would break down the human spirit sacrificing it on the steps of the altar. If religion is to pour new life and gladness into our minds, it must become feeling, inebriating passion for the divine—that inner touch *in magna suavitate*, of which Campanella speaks. This is the inward joy of feeling; it is a life that throbs warmly in the depths of the human soul, not on high in some distant heaven. The source of joy, of strength, of life itself is always there, in art.

IV

Art and Morality

1. *The Problem*

One of the most debated and exciting questions about art is its relation to morality. The question is exciting because, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, nothing is more important to man than morality (one might say at times that the less a man has of it himself the more he expects from others). And it is most debated because it is impossible to reach a definitive solution of the problem so long as the debate is on a level where the opposing parties improvise their premises without any strict definition of the concepts involved—in this case those of art and morals.

The present essay, while investigating the essence of art, could not avoid taking constantly into account the whole life of the spirit. In the background of all our discussion in fact there has always been what is called the practical or moral form of spiritual activity. But it is now time for this concept to be brought out into full light, so that we may understand the relations of morality with art as conceived by us.

2. *Moral Action*

To begin with, I repeat that the practical form of spiritual activity, in the strict sense, is identical with the moral form. For, after all, the whole spirit is practical. Every thought, if it exists at all, must be a product of itself, and so must be considered as productive of spiritual reality. And this is just what is meant by practical activity, or action. When we speak of ineffectual thought, of thought which does not pass into action, we deny it a certain kind of productivity; but it is impossible to deny it the kind of productivity by which it creates itself. For, however worthless this thought may be, it undoubtedly never would have existed without this act of thinking. In like manner we say of a particular thought that it is not only ineffectual but that it is actually nonexistent. And we call it nonexistent because it is absurd, devoid of its proper logical value, though, in order to be judged absurd, it must exist and, as we said before, be something originating from thought itself conceived as a thinking activity. The unproductivity attributed to thought is a matter of degree. It is unproductivity only in relation to certain results other than those inevitably produced by the thinking process. And these results may be most valuable if judged from a point of view higher than that of the man whose action is considered unproductive. The higher value of these results always consists in their higher concreteness. The thinker whose thoughts are unproductive is one who detaches himself from the conditions in which his thought realizes itself and with which he must comply in order to complete his thought without needing to think it through again. These are the conditions by which the thinking subject is not only mind but body, not a single individual body but physical nature, whose universality is not immediate but has to be developed. Consequently, outside the reality which is constantly being produced by thought there is nothing—neither the individual body of the thinker, nor the other bodies which he finds in nature, nor even nature as a whole. This nature, in its turn, identifies itself with the acting subject and seems almost to collaborate with it and lend it its own vast powers for the attainment of the subject's ends. But it only does so because it is the infinite nature, not divided into spatial or temporal parts, but is itself the condition of space and time and division, underlying everything and containing and uniting all things in its unity. It is not here or there but everywhere; not yesterday or today or tomorrow but forever—the "forever" from which the divisions of time arise.

The subject acts only by thinking, but with a thought that contains and carries along in its current the whole of this nature. It constantly recreates this nature through its own act of self-creation and constantly permeates it with its own spirituality. It cannot therefore but possess in its concrete reality the utmost conceivable creative power. In fact everything that can be produced, and therefore everything that can exist, comes into being by virtue of the creative power of such thought. It is not the thought of disarmed prophets or of passive philosophers, but the thought of the man who has a stomach and the use of his limbs, and who tills the earth with those limbs and gives to his stomach its daily bread. So he cultivates the earth and takes possession of it, and wants it to be his; and if others contest his possession, he fights them; and in order to fight more effectively and to live more and more securely, he extends and fortifies his personality ever more. He develops politically the society which he himself potentially was at first; he faces constantly greater dangers, but he constantly achieves a more spiritual and therefore more powerful form of humanity.

Every day there is a problem for man to solve with the means at his disposal—the means which constitute his personality, the subject that he is. He is not only arms and hands in addition to brain, but he is also spade and axe and horse and land and everything. All things are made man. All things are fused in the force which constantly springs from his subjectivity and develops itself as thought, as the discovery of the hitherto unknown, as the solution of a problem which was felt as a need of man's nature and which is now satisfactorily solved.

3. *Difficulties Arising from the Distinction between Intellect and Will*[1]

As we have more than once noticed there are two ways of conceiving thought. It may be conceived as what in logic we call abstract thought, or as concrete thought. The first emphasizes the *truth* of thought, the second its *certainty*.

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[1] Cf. Introduction, chap. III, § 2.

In the first, thought is regarded as true, as that which can be and ought to be thought, even if in fact it is not; we become aware of it because we think it, and so have it present in our mind. But, by a natural law of thought, we make abstraction of ourselves and of the mental act we are performing. In just the same way, when we see a physical object, our first idea is that the object exists independently of our seeing, with its own nature and all its qualities. We say that we see it because it is there, and anyone who would say that it is there because we see it would be considered to be a madman.

In the second, however true and objectively true thought may be, it is regarded as our thought. If it is true, so much the better for us; but it cannot be our truth unless we put into it something of our own. And the more of ourselves we put into our reflecting upon it and elaborating it, the more true and the more objectively true it will be.

Consistent intellectualists who, like the Italian Rosmini, have tried to distinguish sharply the intellect (as the faculty of knowledge) from the will (as the faculty of action) have always found it necessary to recognize two kinds of judgments—the theoretical judgments, in which the intellect consents to a truth whose existence it presupposes, and the practical judgments, in which the will consents to the theoretical judgment. In the former the judging subject is passive, in the latter it awakens and becomes active. In the latter there arises a valuation of truth, or an interest; the subject begins to feel that it is not outside the object order revealed by intellectual knowledge, and cannot remain indifferent to it. And this is *assent*.[2]

But in its most consistent form intellectualism reveals its radical weakness—its realism, which is substantially materialism. It is clear that, in such a theory, before the intervention of the will the importance of the subject is minimized in favor of the object, in order to assure the most pure and absolute objectivity for knowledge. And this is inevitable; for, if whatever is thinkable exists prior to the action of the subject on it, this action, in which spiritual life with all its value must be realized, is excluded from the realm of the thinkable and is therefore annihilated. The subject itself, if it is and is thinkable, must be classed as thinkable reality, that is to say as something existing prior to its own activity and therefore prior to all spiritual life. And this is as much as to say that nothing which is and is thinkable is spiritual, and that all is matter. But if this were so, how could spiritual activity suddenly arise in the form of will? Will is freedom, and freedom cannot be conditioned by anything already existing. Here, on the contrary, the will is conditioned by the whole existing universe. The intellect, on the other hand, while presupposing the existence of everything, must also presuppose the existence of the will, which is thereby degraded to a level where freedom is inconceivable. Again, if the objectivity of truth can only be assured by the passivity of the subject, and if the intellect leaves objective truth unaltered so that we remain outside it, would it not follow that the intervention of the will, which is a relation of the subject to a truth already known, would compromise and indeed ruin at once the objectivity of that truth? For if the clear-sighted intellect must abstain from any active commerce with the object, how can we rely on the judgments of the will, which by itself is blind and irrational, with any serious hope of preserving the virgin purity of the object?

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[2] I have explained and criticized this position in the "Observations" appended to the extracts collected in the small volume entitled *A. Rosmini. Il principio della morale* (Bari: Laterza, 1930).

4. *Abstract and Concrete Thought*

If thought is regarded as mere knowing, devoid of will and of all practical power, it will remain shut off from reality by impassable barriers. The futility of all attempts of the intellectualistic philosophy to break down these barriers only serves to show once more that we can never find what we are after, if we persist in looking for it where it is not to be found. In this instance thought seeks outside itself the reality it possesses within itself—the spirit, the only reality, which can be thought unconditionally, and which exists through self-creation. The spirit is in fact what it makes of itself. And among other things it makes of itself the passive, indolent spectator of a reality supposed to exist independently; and it does this because it has not yet completed the circle of development by which, sooner or later, it will come to complete self-consciousness and become aware of its own infinite responsibility as the author of the only world there is. First it has to pass through the phase of abstract thought which represents the objective moment. And there are sometimes those who, like Belacqua, stretch themselves idly and are angered by warnings or calls to rise and climb the summits of the spirit. But in the end even Belacqua[a] will reach the mountain top. The spirit returns upon itself and therefore overcomes its abstract objective phase. And in its vigorous impulsion, through which it realizes itself as concrete thought, it reaches, as we have seen, the opposite side, that is, pure subjectivity. The thinker, thus, becomes a poet; and he comes to feel within himself a voice which springs from his heart, chanting and enchanting.

Concrete thought, the logical form adequate to self-consciousness, is knowledge but only so far as it is also action. Thought no longer confronts us as those laughable laws (laughable because abstract) of which the Poet speaks when he asks who enforces them ("Le leggi son: ma chi pon mano ad elle?").[b] This abstract thought, if it is really abstract with all the implications of abstraction, is only an empty word; a painted image which no one looks at; a corpse from which life has fled, never to return. Concrete thought is the unity of intellect and will, for it is the dialectic unity of subject and object, of a subject which is identical with its object because it creates such an object and in so doing creates itself. And in creating its object it knows it, and in creating itself it knows itself in the object. And since it knows itself as the object it creates, it is not mere knowledge but creative activity, and therefore practical activity. It is freedom and active will.

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[a] Dante, *Purgatorio*, IV, 106.

[b] Dante, *Purgatorio*, XVI, 97. Cf. Keats, *Sleep and Poetry:* "Musty laws lined out with wretched rule."

5. *Action*

The subject, which is the starting point and foundation of thought as self-consciousness, in becoming concrete thought also becomes action, for it brings into the concreteness of the synthesis the whole of itself.

In art too, as we have observed, the subject brings the whole of itself into its work, which is a spiritual synthesis. For if it did not bring the whole of itself into the work, and did not forget itself in it, and were not able to think of anything but the infinite world into which it has thrown itself, the work of art would lack that infinity which is peculiar to feeling and to the work of art considered from the esthetic point of view; all of which would be impossible, for to take one part of our feeling and leave another would be to break up the living unity of feeling and so to annihilate it. The poet who is thinking of something other than his poetry is an insincere poet; he does not feel what he says.

Now this esthetic element is also found in action, which, being concrete thought, includes also art. And there is no action which is not a work of art, though it is something more. The work of art as such lacks the objective element as essential to action as to thought in general; consequently, it lacks the system which is the mark of thought as the unity of subject and object.

This same esthetic element, on the other hand, is lacking, by definition, in the religious moment of the spirit, and in general in abstract thought. It is missing in scientific thought differing from the philosophical and dwelling on the analysis of an object that, unlike the subject which is unity and infinity, is split up into a multiplicity of parts, each excluding all the others. It is missing in the realistic and materialistic conception of nature, and in metaphysical thought which conceives of reality as existing prior to our speculation about it. It is missing, of course, in these mental orientations to the extent to which they realize their ideals. A metaphysical philosophy like Spinoza's, which presupposes the reality it considers, is nevertheless permeated by the philosopher's passion for truth. Yet his ideal is that of pure contemplation untouched by emotion, so that the subject may entirely immerse itself into the objective substance, and become pure *intelligere.* The same sort of emotion affects the naturalist and the mathematician, though the ideal of each is a genuine *coldness.* Mere analysis, which is nothing more, is in fact an absurdity.

But if we consider analysis in itself and neglect the modicum of synthesis which makes it possible, we see reality anatomized into multiplicity; we see an infinity of separate things; we see a world confronting the subject, and in which the subject cannot discern its own image as one thing, indivisible, infinite. And here we have theory divorced from practice, intellect divorced from will, thought divorced from action. Self-consciousness is suspended and undecided; it becomes inextricably entangled in the labyrinthine distinctions of a thought which is not action and an action which is not thought. The subject feels its failure to find the path to action; it knows a number of things but only in the abstract. This is the point of view of intellectualism.

6. *Moral Life*

To go beyond abstract thought is to go beyond intellectualism and to enter into the concrete reality of the spirit, which is theoretical by virtue of its being practical, and conversely. Here feeling reappears, and art reappears with it; life thus pulses throughout with the presence of the subject. This life is no longer science, in the narrow sense, still less religion; it is philosophy, the true science and the true religion. It is the only science which is concrete, and the only religion which is not an abstract phase of spiritual life but a historical reality. This is the science whose form all science naturally tends to adopt as it transforms itself into philosophy; and it is also the natural outcome of all religious feeling which, in order to establish itself and to know its own nature, has always developed into theological speculation, which is nothing but philosophy. This science or philosophy, of course, is nothing immediate, for, being the most adequate form of the self-conscious spirit, it is its very dialectic in action and therefore the negation of every immediacy. So all philosophies are philosophy and none is *the* philosophy. And since by philosophy we always mean a complete and self-contained system, and such a philosophy is nowhere found, except in the abstract summaries used by the historian to construct his own history, we must admit that the life and value of philosophy is not in the philosophy but in the philosophizing. And what happens when we philosophize? Every error has to be discovered, every defect brought to light and remedied, every dogma has to be scrutinized, every arbitrary presupposition detected and expelled. Mistakes will be made, it is true, but they can only be pointed out by the same philosophical thought which made them. To detect the error is to correct it. It is therefore foolish to blame philosophy for such an error. The common man who does so is a common man and should prepare himself to understand before judging. A restrained judgment will recognize that the remedy to an ill can only come from the patient himself—not from Plato nor from Aristotle, but from the thought in which all philosophers meet on the same plane and speak the same language with mutual understanding, because they are working at one problem, although this problem opens out and articulates itself into thousands. It is the thought which guides us from morning until night and leads us to certain conclusions; but it reawakens with us in the morning and returns to those conclusions and amends them and transforms them into more satisfying ones, through a labor always concluding and never concluded.

In such a development or process of philosophizing, no particular philosophy can ever realize that ideal philosophy which is concrete thought—the union of the subject with abstract thought. In this union, once the ideas are thought, they do not have to wait to be put into practice and, for that purpose, to be adopted by the subject as *its own* thought, beyond which there can be no other thought. They do not have to be inserted by the subject, when it is moved to act, into a world easily molded by man, who is the author of good and evil. Philosophy, as actual philosophizing, has always overcome this dualism of thought and subject and of thought and world, and yet has never left it behind. It is only the particular philosopher, John Doe or Richard Roe, who has a certain conception of the world but does not perceive the ethical consequences that follow from it; or perhaps does recognize them in the complete, organic conception of life which he succeeded in forming, but distinguishes theory from practice and so does not act in accordance with his conception. Two points, however, must be noticed. The first is that since he does wholeheartedly adopt his conception, he does not really think it, he is not deeply convinced of it; and the critics or historians must always distinguish between the words written in his books and those written in his actions, which are no less proof of his effective thought. The second point is that these inconsistencies and contradictions, which we observe in John or Richard, can only be observed by philosophy, which overcomes them in its development, and becomes aware of them only while overcoming them.

At any rate, the tendency of philosophizing is to realize the full self-consciousness. And this is realized in the concreteness of the subject, whose infinity embraces everything, and in the indivisible synthesis of the subject with an object adequate to the subject's nature and therefore also infinite. This tendency is nothing but the dialectic of thought itself, which logically is the very philosophy in its process of self-construction.

All moral action is but philosophizing in the concrete, in earnest, with all our hearts. Every moral error is a philosophical error, which philosophy alone can correct. It does so by recalling the man who has erred to the principles which only philosophical thinking can understand and appreciate, or by recalling him to the self-consciousness so wisely recommended by Socrates who believed that man could find within himself the laws of his life, that is, the universal concepts. This was also what Kant meant when he talked of maxims capable of serving as universal laws—a possibility which can only be noticed by one who thinks. We may even say that this is the meaning of the "neighbor" whom the Christian must love. For, under the concept of "neighbor," friend and enemy become brothers; and the son leaves the father and mother who would shut him off in a particular family; and all feel themselves to be men and sons of God, "made in his image," and identical in their universal essence which is thought actualizing itself in philosophy.

But such philosophizing, we need hardly remind ourselves, is not the more or less esoteric art of academicians or professors of philosophy, but the birthright of "all sons of Eve." And therefore morality, more or less sensitive and refined, tolerant or scrupulous, is characteristic of all men. The half philosophy of some professional philosophers may be a preparation and introduction to a complete philosophy, but in the meantime it is inferior to any philosophy that in any concrete way moves in the life of the spirit, where everything is harmonized and unified in the universal. So Rousseau was not far wrong when he saw more solid morality and conscience in the simple minded than in the cunning inventors of hair-splitting philosophies. Philosophy is nothing but concrete thought, and it may therefore have the utmost simplicity, and it may perfect itself with such simplicity in the mind of a child or a savage, provided that the subject and the whole subject finds itself in the object and in the whole object. This is what is called being rational, but thoroughly rational, so that we may feel our responsibility not only for what we are ourselves, but for all that we usually distinguish from ourselves, although it is within us and identical with our deepest selves.

7. *The Practical Nature of Art*

Such being the concept of morality, it is easy to see the elements of truth and falsehood in the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake, which was maintained and attacked so fiercely in the last century. Its defenders saw in it an axiom indispensable to the concept of the freedom of art; its opponents could not persuade themselves that any human activity could be conceived as independent of all moral obligation; the more serious estheticians, on the other hand, observed that, at the very moment art attains its freedom, it cannot avoid assuming a highly moral value. But these statements, based on a concept not yet demonstrated or defined with due accuracy, were far from throwing light into the matter.

That art cannot be a means to anything other than itself, that it cannot therefore be a means of moral edification, seems to be clearly demonstrated by its spiritual nature. The very nature of the spirit in general and of every form of its activity makes it impossible to conceive of any spiritual activity which does not have its end within itself. The failure to hold fast with utmost tenacity to this principle, which is that of freedom or autonomy or infinity of the spirit, was the first cause of the ambiguous philosophical doctrine of the *useful* or *economic* activity as one of the categories of the spirit. And from this doctrine are derived all the errors of which a celebrated *Philosophy of the Practical*[c] makes such an exhibition. Only things, not the will which employs them, are useful because they are instruments for ends outside the spirit. If the will itself is regarded as a force that can be employed for good or bad ends and therefore as a useful tool, it is no longer the will but a thing, an object which the will can use whenever circumstances allow. Our legs themselves are part of the spirit and share in its subjective aspect, and so do our feet and our shoes,[3] and the earth we tread on. But as we cannot help analyzing our own subjectivity once we have made it an object of thought, we come to distinguish earth and shoes and feet and legs from the self and oppose them to it. We make them into things, and set the self against them as a person who uses them, for instance, for the purpose of walking, of approaching things and taking possession of them. Utility is the very essence of a thing which is not a person but serves a person's end. If utility is to be an attribute of the spirit, it follows that the spirit must be despiritualized and materialized to the degree and extent called for by such an attribute.[4]

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[3] These "shoes" had the merit, when the first edition of this book was published, to fire the imagination of Giovanni Papini who wrote for *Frontespizio* (Florence) of March, 1931, a rather pedantic article, as he sometimes does, especially when he puts his mind to it. There are in fact in that article, "Le scarpe di Giovanni Gentile," many overstrainings and sophisms. However, I am grateful to him for calling my attention to many points where, quoting from memory, I was in error.

[c] Allusion to Croce's *Filosofia della pratica.*

Consequently, either art rejects this attribute of utility, or, if art is made into something that serves a purpose, it loses the character proper to every form and aspect of spiritual life and no longer has value.

None of this implies that art is amoral and that in matters of conduct men can offer art as an alibi for their moral obligations. Only nature is amoral, as commonly conceived by the materialist, for nature is what it happens to be. In nature the wolf is a wolf with the fierce cruelty of its carnivorous instincts, and the lamb is the gentle creature which bends its head to browse the more tender blades. Neither can be brought before an ethical tribunal. But such a nature is purely imaginary; when we think it out more clearly, we see it as our own feeling, the subjective element of our own spirit. Nature, therefore, is within our spirit; and, as we said of feeling, which is the sphere of beauty, it shares in the dematerializing and living dialectic of the spiritual synthesis, in the dialectic which is the source and test of freedom as the essential character of the spirit. The poet is not like a river bed through which the water rushes, hollowing itself a deeper channel or suddenly breaking the banks and flooding the fields. The subject matter of poetry and of art in general coincides with the artist's feeling, but this feeling already presupposes alternatives, choice, and freedom. Even in his temperament man is self-made. He can pride himself on his character since this is itself the result of a victory over something foreign to it. And just as man can resist the allurements which would weaken and, in the end, destroy him, so he can reject himself and forcibly change his nature and convert his soul, and thus love his enemy and embrace the leper whose very sight makes him shrink in disgust.

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[4] A spiritual category is a dialectical unity of opposites, an *a priori* synthesis. Beautiful-ugly, virtuous-vicious, true-false are pairs of opposite terms, and they exclude therefore a middle term. The not-beautiful is ugly, and conversely. There is not the same opposition between useful and noxious, the opposite terms of economics. Between these lies the middle term "useless."

Through the subject matter from which the artist builds his subjectivity he becomes capable of a moral discrimination corresponding to the moral or immoral thought which enters into that subject matter. In plain if inadequate words, the poet has his own education; and as this education forms his intelligence, so it gives him a moral consciousness with certain principles, certain needs, and a certain character. This is what makes up his personality, and gives form and fashion to his feeling as it is reflected in his thought through the work of art. The result will be a world colored by the moral light which will emerge from the feeling that inspires and creates the work. The world of Dante, for instance, is inspired throughout by austere morality and heroic piety not to be found in the world of Boccaccio. Within the poet is the man.

8. *The Morality of Art*

But there is more to be said. Since art consists in the feeling in which all the subject matter of art is dissolved and assimilated, art as such is pure feeling, and we certainly cannot demand of it the morality proper to philosophy. Art lacks the concrete synthesis in which man acts universally and therefore morally. Thus, if we have said that within the poet there is the man, we must add and specify: the man who dreams, that is to say the man concentrated upon himself and cut off from the object—from the object as a whole, as the system of thought in its totality. His object is more *his* than it is object. It has value for him not as an object, or for what it is as an object, but as something indistinguishable from himself, though he does have an object in which he mirrors and represents and expresses himself. And this expression is thought, for it involves synthesis, the same synthesis as that of philosophy, in which we find moral action, but a synthesis focused on the subject. There is a synthesis such that the poet, so far as he is a poet, and so long as his inspiration is warm within him, can admit the possibility of no world other than that which fills his heart and shines in his mind. He is aware of no spiritual life above his own. His world is the only world. The object which is consumed in the fire of his subjective feeling is the only object.

Now, what is poetry from the philosophical point of view, is already philosophy from the poetic point of view, that is, thought in the fullness of its synthesis, in which the poet knows the truth to the extent to which he fulfills his duties. From the point of view peculiar to art, art, in its autonomy as spirit, is the whole spirit, that is, philosophy and therefore morality.

All this implies that the artist has his duties just as does the man who thinks and acts—duties not to the world but to his own world, to the world of art. He owes his whole self to the world of art, into which he must put his whole mind. He must think of nothing but what he can find in himself, he must be faithful to himself and to his own inspiration with a sincerity which is honesty and loyalty. He must believe what he says and feel what he believes. He must put into the thought he thinks and into the words he uses nothing more nor less than his real feeling. False art is esthetically false because it is morally false.

9. *Art as the Educator of Mankind*

It is owing to this intrinsic morality that art has always been the great educator of mankind, while corrupting art has always been considered to be false art—false because one-sided and partial as compared to true art which is always a spiritual whole. Ugliness can only be the expression of feelings into which a man has failed to put his whole self; in other words, superficial feelings not profoundly felt. For the lack of seriousness—the seriousness which is as necessary to art as to morality—and irresponsibility and frivolity are the same thing as lack of feeling; and this is the source of affected, extravagant, burlesque, bombastic, erotic art. Where we have feeling we have everything, for feeling is as universal and infinite as the soul whose essential nature it is. And this infinite universality of feeling is what constitutes the humanity of true art which, while expressing each man's innermost heart, turns out to be what is deepest in the hearts of all men without distinction of time or space. So it makes us all brothers in heart and all of one soul—a soul that in its infinity must overcome all opposition and difference and develop into a thought, that is to say, into a world where every spiritual act has the universal form and so is the act not of *a* spirit but of *the* spirit.

Thus, within a work of art, where the cry of the human soul sounds most loudly, the author and his audience discover mutual sympathy and attraction. And no man is a poet unless, like Carducci, he feels rising from his heart a hymn of love, whatever poetry he writes. Love is not the whole of morality; but it is the foundation of it, upon which thought must build up a system of life with its opposites but also with its unity where all opposites are reconciled and peace is established.

10. *The National Character of Art*

It may be thought that this fundamental unity of spirits is the Hegelian superworld. But this is not the place for a discussion concerning the sort of heaven in which Hegel unites art with religion and with philosophy; we can accept his conception in the sense of a spiritual reality in which the spirit is realized in universal and eternal forms where all marks of particular individuality, whether historical or national, are obliterated. However, we must emphatically deny the possibility of distinguishing spiritual creations into two classes—historical and universal. Everything spiritual is both historical and universal—historical if it is thought of and set aside as a fact, universal if it is thinking activity. The spirit as value is universal and eternal; but value belongs to the spirit only when active; it belongs to art so far as art realizes itself in a given work. Within *The Evening of the Festival*[a] no other poetry or world or feeling is possible. But the work of art is nothing unique when considered from the historical or philosophical point of view. There are many of them and, since they are many, it is clear that each can only be identified and individualized historically through its historical determinations. All these determinations concern the content of individual works of art, but through the content they are mirrored in the works of art, which thereby acquire particular characteristics of nationality and of every other kind. Certainly works of art cannot be judged esthetically from this point of view, any more than our actions can ever be judged morally by the actual change they have produced, though historically every action is individualized according to the man who performed it, the circumstances in which it was carried out, the effects that follow from it, and so on.

In conclusion, the same reasons which justify histories of art also justify the classification of the material of such histories into chronological periods marked off by definite characteristics of civilization, or corresponding to particular movements of thought, or according to national divisions. Certainly the history of art only touches art indirectly, through the medium of thought; and each time we must go beyond thought in order to reach the esthetic kernel. Hence, at every step of history we must go beyond the history of art and obliterate it if we are to save art from being submerged into history. The fact is that there is no art without the work of art, which is a synthesis—a synthesis in which feeling is clothed with thought. And those who do not care to strip it will never be able to enjoy the charms of beauty.

Art is national in two senses, analogous to the two senses in which it is moral. First it is national because the preconditions of art (among which is morality) acquired by the artist through education mark him with a national character. Nationality is an historical form of the universality of the subject, for the subject gradually appropriates and fuses in his personality certain elements which are common and peculiar to the historical individuality made up of all the men who live in common one same spiritual life, who have the same interests and the same will, and who submit to the same laws and to the same legislative power of the State. One of these common elements is the language—an historical growth which in every stage of its life goes beyond its historical nature and takes on the value of the spirit which it characterizes. For the language which a writer finds is never precisely the one he will use; he will use one of his own, but it will be all the same a development of one which is considered to be the antecedent and which, through his genius, he recreates and renovates and attaches to his name. So there are historical reasons for classing together all the writers of a given language, and also for admitting into the same history writers of different languages whenever other national characteristics suggest their inclusion in the same line of historical development. Now the language we learn from our mother's lips is a precondition of the work of art and leads to it, though in order to read a poem or a novel we must pierce through the language to the marrow of art.

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[a] *La sera del dì di festa*, a poem by Leopardi.

The second sense in which art is national is the following. If a writer's language is not the one he received but the one he creates, he belongs to his nation not only by virtue of the preconditions of his art but by virtue of that art itself, since he contributes essentially to the formation of the national consciousness, beginning with the language which he creates freely and by the intrinsic law of his artistic activity, without any thought or desire of enriching or extending the spiritual inheritance of his country. But however strictly he confines himself within the limits of free art and practices art for art's sake, no art will come of it unless he devotes himself to it seriously and religiously, that is to say morally. No artist can avoid influencing the life of his country by his own life. And so, whether he likes it or not, he is bound to become one of the geniuses or fathers of his country thus living eternally in the souls of those yet unborn. They will speak the same language, will dwell on the same soil and feel themselves bound to it as to their home. They will have memories, sacred because rooted in the depths of their hearts, as elements of their personality and of what they must be, and desire to be, if they would not belie themselves and abandon the post they have won in the world.

V

The Immortality of Art

1. *The Concept of Immortal Life*

Immortality is easier to assert than to deny, and therefore faith in it is more common than doubt. It might even plausibly be maintained that those who have spoken of the death of art meant nothing that would be the negation of its immortality, properly understood.

In general it is much easier to talk about immortality than to have a concept of it free from contradictions and therefore thinkable. Man seems naturally inclined to talk of it, and he brings himself to doubt it only by an effort of philosophical reflection, however imperfect. The truth is that we cannot think without attributing a value to our thought; and thought could not have a value unless the thinking spirit could exercise a free activity—an activity which would be absurd if the spirit were in any way limited. The profound reason for believing in immortality is that it appears as the necessary condition of the existence of thought and of its capacity for attaining truth and for distinguishing it from falsehood. If a man were shut in between the boundaries of birth and death, beyond which were other realities different from himself and therefore conditioning his existence and his behavior, he could not know the truth or distinguish it from its opposite. He could only know what in fact he happened to know, without distinction as to whether it be true or false. To have true knowledge, therefore, is to enter the infinite and the eternal, to realize a life not bounded in time and space but capable of containing time and space within itself. This is the fundamental experience of every thinking man; it is the foundation on which thought builds all that is thinkable.

When we say immortal life we have expressed the need to think of life as immortal, but we are still far from thinking it so, really. For to think a thing we must be able to think it together with all that is connected with it, so that the whole may contain no contradictions. Now the spirit thinks itself to be at once immortal and finite, above time and in time, above space and in space, at once outside the process of becoming which causes things to be and not to be, and also transient and subject to change. So Plato's rudimentary and naïve conception of the immortality of the spirit is still the most popular; according to it the spirit goes through the vicissitudes of nature without having any part in them; it is enclosed in the body but essentially unrelated to it; it is subject to the uneasy succession of life and death in the body with all their shocks and tempests, entangled in the inextricable web of being and non-being which is the lot of all natural things, and is yet always able in the end to struggle out of that web, to free itself from that body, and to rise to a world wholly consonant with its own immortality or ideal nature. The eternity of the spirit implies an existence before, during, and after its life in this world, but even if its existence began with its creation, it must at least endure after its mortal life has ended, in a succession of moments contiguous but distinct. Such succession is finite in time, infinite in eternity; but its infinity is no positive concept (for that would involve it in insoluble antinomies); it only has the negative character capable of suppressing any limit. Thus immortal life would be life everlasting.

But such immortality is a figment of the imagination. An immortal being endowed with this immortality that is infinite duration, far from always living, would rather be always dying and have no life at all. In a river we shall always find water, but never the same water. If the water from the source cuts itself a bed and makes itself a channel to flow in, it will be its end; it will never stop, but will go on to mix its waters with the sea. If we step into its rapids we are lost; they will carry us down to the sea of death.

2. *The Immortality of Thought*

If man begins to contemplate himself and the life by which that self is realized, like a man standing on a bank with dry feet and careful not to slip into the river, his thought must seem to him fated to flow away like the water. And if he tries to think of himself as eternal, he seems to be able to do so only under the likeness of a perennial and inexhaustible stream, which can always quench his thirst, though never with the same water. What he forgets is that, besides the thought he thus contemplates as if it were the flowing of a river, there is also the thought which has to contemplate that flowing. He could not observe the movement of the water in its bed if he himself and everything else were moving with the water. The primary thought, the true thought, by which we can think whatever we will, is not the thought flowing past before our eyes, as it were, but the one standing still and seeing everything else flow past, including even, in a certain sense, thought itself. This primary thought is thought in action, which in relation to the other thought is motionless; but, in reality, it also moves, though with a totally different movement. It is motionless because it has to observe the movements of things and of thought regarded as a thing; but it does move so far as it observes itself. In fact it is never still, since even when it observes things it is really only observing itself. Its action is like that of a general who is observing the development of a battle from a hilltop, and does not change his position but only follows the movements of his troops with his eyes. The center is a single point where there can be no movement, for it would imply the passage from one point to another; the movement is on the circumference, which contains infinite points.

Yet the general is only stationary as compared with the movement of the army; if he were absolutely motionless he would fall asleep. So it is with thought, which pictures the movements of all things distributed in space, even the movements of thought itself distributed in time, while it remains motionless in its post of observation at the center of the field, so that it may have a point of reference for measuring time and space. But if thought is to dominate space and time and to synthesize in itself the history of all thought which comes within its range of observation, it must be wide awake. And to be awake is not to give itself up to the environment but rather to become aware of itself through the construction of an object in which the self is reflected and acquires consciousness of its own subjective being. To be awake, in short, is to move, to pass, not from one point of time or space to another (which would only mislay or dissipate our essential unity) but from one to another abstract phase of our true dialectical being. Such movement is an abstract, logical process, in which the unity of the spirit, far from deteriorating, assures, fortifies, and vitalizes itself, so that it is not only present but maintains itself and resists all dissolving agents. Herbart properly called this *Selbsterhaltung*.

This unity of the movement, which is not in time and is therefore eternal, does not exclude multiplicity; rather, it is a unity of multiplicity. If space and time are multiplicity, they are conceivable only so long as their multiplicity is summed up and collected in the unity of thought, which thinks of all things in space in relation to one another, and of all events distributed in time and similarly connected in a certain order.

Now it is true that all things are mortal, and so are all men, fathers and sons alike, and all their thoughts and words and deeds, and in short all the multitude of elements which comes before our minds whenever, from the crest of the wave of time, we survey the past centuries and those to come, and evoke the epochs already dead and those yet to die. The immense outlook reminds us of a boundless ocean, whose surface seems to be rough or agitated here and there for a moment, but soon becomes once more smooth, flat, and still. It is like the immensity of the desert where nothing grows. But if we consider that things are many only because they are collected and conjoined in a relation of unity, if beneath every multiplicity we can discern the underlying unity that makes it possible, if we can grasp the unity that is in ourselves, then the multiplicity will not wither and disperse as severed limbs of the living body, but will be given fresh life and vigor by reunion in that unity which is the soul. The desert is populated again, the ocean renews the incessant movement of its waters and life swarms once more upon its surface and in its depth. The poet's "days that are no more"[a] spring again in the thought of the living, which in becoming self-conscious becomes history. In history multiplicity organizes itself through thought which permeates it and gives it life.

If we consider this self-consciousness, which is identical with philosophy and with history, and which brings reality into being as thought; if we consider this triumphant unity which overcomes multiplicity and conquers the time and space in whose toils all mortal things are entrapped, then only can we understand eternity and immortality. For the living act of thought, the thought which has value, never perishes. Histories and philosophies, no doubt, do not last; what was an act of thinking becomes the subject matter of another act of thinking and is left behind; it is no longer historical thinking, but the object of that thinking. But what never dies is the history of which all histories are part, the philosophy which is in all philosophies, that is, philosophizing, in which all life and reality of philosophy consist. In fact a philosophy dies when the philosophizing which produced it brings it to an end. But the act of philosophizing lives forever. The unity of thought is immanent and not transient; its many forms change and pass for the very reason that they are many; they do not pass away but they abide, for in the heart of each of them is a living unity.

This is the life of the particular individual, provisionally detached from thought, as compared to a material body similarly detached from the material world. This is also the life of the individual who is universal, concrete, infinite, and whose body is the whole of nature concentrated in the subject of spiritual life. The particular individual would seem to have his day, which, like so many pleasant days, does not last long. But the true individual is not finite but infinite, not a part but the whole; and that is why the true life is immortal, and it is not even possible to speak of its duration as either long or short. Sappho, unhappy Sappho, is dead; but the cry of her soul lives, for the soul that uttered it is the same humanity in which we who hear it live.

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[a] Leopardi, *L'infinito*, 12: "morte stagioni." Cf. Tennyson, *The Princess:* "Tears, idle tears."

3. *The Immortality of Art*

The spirit as such in its concrete reality is immortal, and so is art which contributes to that concrete reality. It is immortal in two senses, though in the end the two senses coalesce. Every work of art is immortal, and art as an element in the spiritual synthesis is immortal. While the work is really immortal, the author is immortal only metaphorically, whatever illusion human vanity and those who theorize about it may have. By the author I here mean one man as distinct from others, a unit in the multiplicity from which the web of history is woven, a thought which is a fact and not an act of thinking.

The work of art is immortal because it expresses the subjectivity which is infinite; and such a subjectivity is not a man, who would be mortal, but the humanity of that man, the feeling which, in the work of art, takes on a definite, particular individuality without losing any of its intrinsic wholeness. It is the soul embodied in the work of art, the same immortal soul incarnate in every human work and which pulses in every human heart. The body perishes; a manuscript or a picture may be lost; a host of parchments containing great poetry may perish, as in the burning of the Alexandrian library;[b] a noble palace may be ruined and destroyed; but the soul that was in all of them is the soul that animates the surviving works of art, and warms the hearts of all living men, and will inspire every future work of art, and makes possible the discovery of other copies of the lost manuscripts or the restoration of the ruined palace, and thereby the resurrection of artistic individualities which were thought to be lost and yet come to life again in the human spirit. Their soul, which gave them life and beauty, was not lost. A living man may, by some shocking accident, lose arms and legs and eyes and ears, and yet may concentrate his life in his remaining torso and express it in his face and in his speech or in any other form on which he can still impress his thought; similarly the recovery of a mere fragment of some work of art is sometimes enough to produce in the interpreter's spirit, that is to say in the subject, a powerful echo which is the full and total voice, the soul of the artist.

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[b] Famous ancient library, partially burned by Caesar's soldiers in 47 B.C., destroyed in 390 A.D. during a civil war.

It is evident that the work of art is immortal not in its subject matter, in its technique, in the body clothed by art, nor in the thought by which the gifted soul expresses itself, for all these elements of the work of art are in themselves mortal. But it is immortal in the feeling that gives it life. And since in all works of art feeling is everything, that is to say the form in which the subject matter is absorbed and transformed, it is impossible to distinguish the form and the matter of a work of art, or pronounce one mortal and the other immortal. Consequently, when the critic has succeeded in appreciating the beauty of a work of art, every word or thought or element that analysis can distinguish within the work is no longer anything that has a distinct form in his mind, before which there only remains the pure soul in its light.

When the poet said "Jupiter dies but the poet's song to him lives,"[c] he was not strictly correct. His error arises from his taking different points of view in the two clauses of the statement. The poet's hymn lives only insofar as we sing it, insofar as we interpret it and in so doing go beyond the content and reach its form. But to reach this goal we must pass through the content.

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[c] Carducci, *Dante* (*Rime nuove*), 14: "Muor Giove, e l'inno del poeta resta."

And it forbids our passage if we read into the words that express it a thought different from the poet's thought, from his conception of the world, from his religious faith or from the complex subjective attitude which made up his concrete feeling. When we judge the content to be untrue we have considered it from the point of view of abstract thought; but if we are to feel the poetry of the hymn, we must enter into the concrete thought, where the form springs from the content and the content from the form in the circle of the living spiritual synthesis. A critic who still distinguishes a content as having a value of its own, apart from the form with which it is identified and from which it receives its own concrete form and existence, is still on the threshold of art and cannot break into it.

The truth is that, if the hymn lives, Jupiter lives too; he lives in the hymn. What the poet must have implied is that it would be vain to look for a living Jupiter outside the poetry which has immortalized him by making him a part of it.

4. *The Hegelian Theory*

Art is immortal as a stage of spiritual synthesis in concrete thought, as a fundamental activity or category of the spirit.[1] This has been a controversial point in the history of esthetic theory. The place which my earlier writings assigned to art in the system of spiritual forms gave rise to interpretations of my thought similar to those occasioned by Hegel's esthetics as viewed by some Hegelians. They found in his esthetics a conception quite foreign to it and only possible to an abstract and undialectical philosophy—the conception of art as destined one day to disappear into a spiritual form in which the existence and the essence of the spirit perfectly coincide. Thus the Italian De Meis[2] used to speak of the nineteenth century as the age of thought, meaning free thought, reason, philosophy. And since this philosophy could not help being prose, he thought its breath would extinguish poetry.

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[1] A category is properly the synthesis as the becoming or living unity of the contrary opposites.

[2] In his book *Dopo la laurea* (Bologna: Monti, 1868–1869; 2 vols.) which, despite all its paradoxes and half-truths and prolixity, is still alive and suggestive.

But we may say here, in passing, that this, like other interpretations of Hegel's thought (for instance the interpretation of his political theory which would make the historical development culminate in the Prussian State), overlooks once more the logical distinction between abstract and concrete thought. The failure to take this distinction into account leads one particular school of criticism (whose self-confidence is in direct proportion to the speculative insensibility which it displays) to claim that a dialectical philosophy carries its dialectic to such an extreme that no systematic thought, no concept, not even the most elementary thought can be allowed. Thus, this school is gratified by the satanic satisfaction of seeing the dialectic destroyed by its own weight, *ruere mole sua.* But sorry as we may be to deprive the critics of this magnanimous satisfaction, things are not quite as they suppose. Hegel does not emphasize that, though dialectic obeys a logical principle in direct antithesis to the principle of noncontradiction, it does not destroy the latter but finds it indispensable. Subsequent logic has made it clear that dialectic is intrinsic to thought in the making, in its coming into being, in the act of self-consciousness, where the concept is self-concept. But thought in the making is not a wheel turning and turning uselessly and eternally in a void. The very conception of it implies also the conception of a thought that has been formed, so that everyone who thinks always thinks something, namely a certain thought. This latter is abstract thought, and considered by itself is not self-supporting; it depends upon the thinking activity in which the object of thinking and the thinking subject perfectly coincide. It is through the thinking process that the subject comes to consciousness of itself, that is, to concrete thought. Dialectical thought, then, contains within itself the thought based on the principle of identity and noncontradiction. If it did not, it would lack the definite nature in which it is realized. This implies that thought based on identity is superseded by dialectical thought, but it also implies the presence of the former, just as the flame implies the presence of the fuel which burns in it. There is no fire without sticks.

Abstract thought is formulation, definition; it is a closed system, whereas concrete thought is an open system. Consequently, to expect that the system of a philosopher who conceives reality dialectically can be an open system and not take the form of a conception in which the truth of the principle and the truth of its consequences are mutually dependent, is to confuse the laws of abstract thought with those of concrete thought and to misunderstand completely what dialectic is.

Now, once we have admitted this distinction between the thought which constructs and the thought which has been constructed, to demand that the system of a philosophy in the very act of its formulation be not closed within clear and insurmountable limits is like demanding that a man talk and express himself without uttering a word. A lively, futuristic demand, but only lively and futuristic! Certainly dialectical thinking does not stand self-condemned to such a fate.[3]

Accordingly it is of the very laws of dialectical thinking that the definition should not be dialectical but should in a sense crystallize the very dialectic movement. Such a movement, if the law is correct, will take over the definition and develop it so that it will give rise to a new definition which will not be contradictory to the first but will belong to a wider system of thought. Indeed, the very unity of abstract and concrete thought implies that the more firmly we try to fix and stabilize the *vis logica* of the definition, the more there arises from its very heart the movement which is to go beyond it and transform it and lift it into a higher region of truth.

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[3] Platonic dogmatism, *mutatis mutandis*, leveled a similar criticism against the kind of dialectic exhibited in the subjectivism of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates there objects that if Protagoras were right he would also be wrong, for others disagree with him and yet he cannot contradict them since his premise is that all thought is true. "If Protagoras," continues Socrates ironically, "could rise from the grave he would laugh at us." Of course, Protagoras might have replied that he could well afford to admit that the man who contradicted him was right—right, that is to say, for himself, but not for Protagoras who kept to his own opinion. Protagoras did not see, any more than Socrates or Plato did, the universal character of truth inherent in this opinion of his. But this did not prevent the position of Protagoras from being unconquerable by the dogmatism which he had already overcome, though in a crude and materialistic way. At any rate such a criticism could not stop the mouth of the great sophist. This does not imply that Protagoras would be right today, nor yet that Plato, apart from this particular criticism, would be in the wrong.

If we do not creep treacherously behind the philosopher's back and focus our attention on the very object he is constructing by his philosophical thinking, we have no right to forbid him to keep within the four walls of his system. We may even say that in so doing he sacrifices himself to the spirit, which must go through this formula, though it must soon break it in order to advance further. Yet it is the same spirit which dies to be born again and almost lives on its death. Enclosed as he is within his system, the philosopher cannot help seeing the drama of reality as reaching its climax and conclusion. In such an ending, which after all does not end anything, lies the satisfaction of closing up the circle, of returning to the artistic stage, to the catharsis inherent in the synthesis of the spirit. Every man, in return for the laborious dialectic of life, has a claim to a night of refreshing rest, to the joy of work well done, to the recovery of himself and all his energies which may enable him to return tomorrow with renewed vigor to his daily task. God himself rested on the seventh day; *vidit cuncta quae facerat* and rejoiced in them because *erant valde bona.*[d]

So the drama of the object in which the subject mirrors itself has been played out, and for the moment there is an end to it. Thus the philosophy of history, by systematizing history, brings it to an end; the history which gives art its place in universal history is bound to see it as disappearing into philosophy, into the historian's own thought, which entirely dominates and interprets it. The theorists who lay down the lines on which future art or politics or philosophy must develop are always entirely devoid of art, politics, and philosophy; they are like the dog which dropped the piece of meat from its jaws to snatch the larger piece it saw mirrored in the water.

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[d] He saw everything he had done and rejoiced in it because it was very good.

But, one might reply, this is to confuse historical with ideal development. It is the mistake into which Giambattista Vico fell in writing his *Scienza nuova*, where the stages and categories of the life of the spirit are treated as historical periods. The consequence is that, once we have reached the stage of full reason—which is the stage of the philosopher—it is impossible to see how we could again fall back into barbarism and from there go forward in a new *cycle*.

But the mistake was made by the critics. The historical development which must not be confused with the ideal is that of concrete thought; the historical development which is itself abstract thought cannot be distinguished from the ideal development, for abstract thought is by definition ideal. We may renounce understanding history; but if we do understand it, it must be an abstract thought, which unfolds only within itself. Concrete thought goes beyond the abstract, as history is always outgrowing itself; but whenever this new outgrowth of history becomes an object of thought, it can only be in the form of abstract thought, like history which history itself outgrows.

5. *The History Which Is Not Outgrown*

History outgrows the history which is abstract thought, but not the history which is concrete thought, and in which abstract thought finds its actuality. Concrete thought is synthesis, not as the merging of thesis with antithesis, but as an activity which produces this merging through the opposites that it also generates; for only by generating the opposites as such does it produce their fusion. Hence follows a consequence of the greatest importance: the activity which produces the concrete thought as a unity of opposites (namely the being and non-being of the spirit, or subject and object) cannot be altered; it is immortal, eternal. The world is made and remade, dies and is reborn, as it moves along; but this activity endures. It continues to live as the synthesis which develops itself in opposition—as subject, as object, and as unity of the two. In this living organism every part is alive because the whole lives; the heart lives with the life of the whole and is maintained by it as a necessary mode of its being. If the heart stopped, the organism would perish. Art is the subject which in the synthesis is negated by the object; it is annihilated by that conversion of itself into its contrary, for feeling, once expressed, becomes a sort of object for indifferent contemplation in which the subject forgets itself and its subjectivity and loses sight of itself. But the object into which the subject disappears is, in its turn, alive, for the subject negates it and annihilates it as a pure objectivity, thus paying it back in its own coin. In short, both subject and object live by dying in the unity which suppresses their abstract opposition and realizes them in their concrete opposition. In this concrete opposition each of them is itself but also in a sense the other, to which it is inseparably bound by a relation that is necessary because it is essential to both.

In the concrete unity each of the opposites lives because it shares in the life of the whole that unites them. It is this unity which confers immortality on every work of art; it is the salt which preserves all mortal things eternally. This is what was meant in saying that the two senses in which art may be called immortal are in the end the same. What is eternal in each work of art is the soul that animates it; the soul which is the beauty and the life of art; the soul whose dialectic is immanent in the work as it is in the complete synthesis of the spirit though, when considered in the abstract and outside that synthesis, it is only an element or particular organ of the living whole.

Just as the development of any natural organism implies the development of every organ, however small, which contributes to the life of the whole, so the development of feeling does not exhaust itself or come to an end in thought. Its exhaustion would involve the exhaustion of thought and its fall from concrete into abstract thought. But thought, which is synthesis, is dialectical; it is a becoming that is never completed, precisely because the feeling which nourishes it is itself a becoming never completed, a process and not a result. And so it is with art, regarded as an ideal stage of the spirit; so too is it, as we saw when discussing creative criticism, with every work of art.

Things are not immortal. They all perish because, while abstractly identical each with itself, they are all different from one another and one gives way to the other. This difference does not belong to the spirit in which all is change and many things seem to flourish—ideas, fancies, systems, and poems. In all its various forms the spirit remains one. And if everything is spirit, then all these things of which it is so convenient to talk (since they save us the trouble of getting inside them and discovering the spirit) are all immortal. In their fundamental unity, in that universe which is feeling disguised as nature, they all share in the immortality of the spirit.

The spirit moves in an eternal circle; but as it moves from the subject to the object, it is a process of becoming and not one of stagnation; it does not lie idly but it mounts in spirals to the summit of its spirituality. The circles or gyres of abstract thought are many—not seven as in Dante's *Purgatorio*, but an infinity, since mortal sins are not seven but an infinite number. But in concrete thought, in the real synthesis of self-consciousness, there is one circle which cannot be repeated.

The conception of thought and feeling as alternately producing each other in history is proper to abstract thought. It represents the immortality of art as a sort of ferment immanent in all of philosophy and life, as a constant alternation of the artistic and speculative or practical activities. In these activities the spirit, weary with its labors in the creation of hard reality, seems from time to time to pause and collect itself, and to seek invigoration and refreshment at the springs of youth and feeling. Accordingly, if it allows itself to relax gladly and to give free rein to its subjective inclination, it cannot avoid returning, sooner or later, to the moment of responsible thought and hard reflection; thus it turns to ponder on the divine laws of the world from which it cannot withdraw itself. In this eternal alternation the spirit manifests and celebrates, in its distinct moments, the immortality of its own life.

CONCLUSION

[*A Sketch of the History of Esthetics*]

1. *From Empirical to Philosophical Esthetics*

In the foregoing essay all the chief problems into which the problem of art is divided have received their solutions. These solutions still require further explanation and development in their corollaries; and they may serve as an incentive to new discussions and inquiries in the field of esthetics—a field which has too long been in a state of stagnant dogmatism, fruitless both for criticism and for philosophy. In order to escape such a state, we have deliberately refrained, as we proceeded in this essay, from enclosing our observations in short and precise formulas so easy to memorize and so handy to apply, but so useless and obstructive to those who really wish to understand. We have striven not to give our doctrine the definite character of a truth already discovered and ready to be announced to the learned and curious world. We have preferred discussion to conclusions, careful and laborious inquiry to clear-cut results, and in this we have followed, from start to finish, the inspiration coming from distant glimpses of truth and from the conviction of being on the right track. The result is that many readers who already know one esthetic doctrine and more or less understand the principles announced in it, may be disappointed with this essay, which gives them no new doctrine, is hard for them to read, and offers to the casual reader no ready-made ideas for easy application. On the contrary, it will involve thought in obscure and abstruse problems which are only indirectly connected with the argument and are never disentangled or cleared but always lumped together; which is perhaps too much for unpracticed or slow minds. The author hopes that he will not be accused of foolish vanity if he confesses that such results do not trouble him in the least. They are precisely the results at which his essay aimed. For, it may be said in coming to an end, that the intention of the book was not to attempt a popular exposition of a few ideas derived from a presupposed system of philosophy, but rather a philosophical inquiry without any presuppositions. Such an inquiry must discuss without prejudice whether there is such a thing as art in the absolute reality of which, philosophically speaking, the world consists; and, if there is, what is its nature and what are its properties and functions in the system of reality.

There has been, and there still is an esthetic which, like other particular sciences, starts from the assumption that art exists—the art of which everyone talks without, of course, exactly knowing what it is. It also assumes that there are other things recognized by common sense as akin to art; and having assumed all this without proof, it inquires about the properties art shares with these kindred things, singling out those peculiar to it. This is empiricism, which refuses to go beneath the surface and moves on the level of common sense, trying only to bring about some order. Such an esthetics, however careful and conscientious, can never solve the philosophical problems of art, because it does not even raise them. It is empirical esthetics. We discussed it in the Introduction.

But there is (and no reason why there should not be) a different esthetics which leads us to the realization that, if we confine ourselves to the particular, we shall never understand it, for its true nature is only manifest in the whole to which it belongs, in the universal of which it is an instance. This esthetics goes back from the facts to be explained to the principle that can explain them because it produces them; from the part of the system it advances to the whole to which that part belongs. In short it aims at understanding the place of art in the spirit, if the spirit is the whole; and if thought concludes that even the spirit is only one form of being, then this esthetics aims at understanding the place of art in that vast context of being. This is philosophical esthetics. It constitutes the subject matter of the present essay.

Our essay, consequently, is addressed directly to students of philosophy. But I allow that by its method as well as by its subject, it may have some interest also for critics who love art, even if they have never undertaken a systematic study of philosophy; it may even interest artists themselves who, strictly, know no philosophy other than that which is contained in their art and coincides with it; but they too discuss art and have of it a conception of their own. For even if artists and critics find an empirical esthetics more manageable, this is not to say that they are satisfied with it. On the contrary, they too may have to call to mind the words of Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy!"[a] Philosophy does not raise difficulties at random or for amusement, like Berni's[b] mule which made the stones come out of the earth for the pleasure of stumbling over them.[1] When one empirical philosophy provides for a question a provisional answer which works for a time, that is, until thought observes and reflects further, the answer is at first welcomed as quite satisfactory. But as soon as some new facts are noticed and are found not to fit into the theory, then we become aware that this theory is too narrow and will not do. New difficulties occur every day; unlooked-for problems suddenly arise, all quite naturally, for

[1] Someone corrected me by pointing out that Berni's mule was not really his, but belonged to his friend Florimonte, and that the stones the mule made appear in its way were coming from hell and not from the earth. I offer my thanks for the correction, but I continue to believe it obvious that what I said must be said the way I said it.

[a] I, v.

[b] Francesco Berni (1497–1535). The remark concerning his mule refers to Berni's "Sonetto della mula" dedicated to his friend Caleazzo Florimonte (see Berni's *Poesie e Prose*, edited by Ezio Chiorboli [Florence: Olschki, 1934], pp. 123–125). Gentile's remark is erroneous as is pointed out in note 1 above.

that is the nature of thought, the law of logic. So, whether we like it or not, we begin with an empiricial esthetics and end with feeling the necessity of something different. Vigorous minds press on, the sluggards fall behind, but all move in the same direction and all feel the need to go as far as possible. Some balk, as if they were on the wrong road, grumble and argue. They even stamp their feet in protest, but in the end they listen all the same.

2. *The Prehistory of Esthetics and Greek Philosophy*

Philosophical esthetics was born in modern times, for the ancients did not recognize the world in which art has its place. Therefore, all the statements made by ancient philosophers about the artistic activity and about beauty represent the prehistory and not the history of esthetics. Art in fact is a spiritual activity, and the spirit was never given a place within the reality with which ancient thought was concerned. In this prehistory we may find vague though penetrating hints, but nothing deduced from a coherent concept consistent with the principle and the method of philosophy. Even after Socrates, philosophy was naturalistic, whether nature was conceived as material and impervious to thought or, from Socrates on, as essentially abstract. Nature was indeed considered to be universal, but nonetheless as a mere object of thought; it was even considered as thought—but not as the act of thinking, rather as a fact being thought. Before man can begin to think there exists, according to this view, all that is thinkable, the whole of reality; but there still remains excluded from it the thinking activity itself in which the spirit consists. Ancient philosophers write about human society; but this, for them, is already something empirical like nature, something which man finds and does not create himself. And in society they find laws and the State, customs and morals; but these too are matters of experience and the study of them is directed merely to the elimination of the arbitrary elements that cause human action to diverge from the laws of nature, the knowledge of which constitutes the highest wisdom.

No wonder that Plato, with his eyes fixed on that wisdom, banishes poetry from his ideal republic, for the feeling contained in poetry prevents it from rising to pure knowledge, to the intuition of the universal ideas. There is no room for poetry in the world of universal ideas, which is the real world, whose perfection and rationality is mirrored in the ideals of the human mind and, therefore, in political life. In Plato's philosophy, beauty is not an attribute of the spirit; the spirit longs for beauty which, like goodness, is a value and therefore an attribute of the universal ideas. Man and natural things only receive a reflection or image of beauty. But all natural beings and nature itself are subject to love, and are in love with beauty, which they desire because they do not possess it. Thus beauty, both in early and later Platonism, down to Alexandrian times, is a metaphysical entity characterizing a reality outside the spirit, and has nothing to do with the beauty of art.

Even in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is our major document concerning this prehistory of esthetics, there are two fundamental concepts: that of imitation (mimesis) and that of the universality of the artistic image. But both concepts point to the naturalistic conception which was the negation of art. The idea of imitation in fact identifies art with nature, and consequently gives nature a value which art receives only by reflection. The universality, or semiuniversality, which distinguishes the subject matter of art from historical representations, which are always of the individual, follows from the mimetic theory. For in nature the significance and essence of the individual simply resides in the universal which is its form. In fact universality, which for us moderns belongs to the spirit, belongs for Plato and Aristotle to the world, which is presupposed by the spirit. For Plato it belongs to the intelligible world, which is outside both nature and spirit; for Aristotle to nature itself, which is wholly intelligible through its forms and through the unity of those forms, into which Aristotle endeavors to bring the transcendent universals of Plato.

Yet in the element of feeling which Plato detects in art (art being conceived in his system as a deceptive image of truth); in the nature which Aristotle points to in art (though for him art cannot possess the complete universality of nature); in the very universality which he discovers to be essential to art; even in the metaphysical value assigned to beauty throughout Platonism, there are glimpses of truth, well worth our attention. But the concept of art is lacking, and its absence is not noticed because the ancient mind was directed entirely to external reality.

3. *The Middle Ages and the Renaissance*

In the middle ages we find a ferment of life which, when it has borne its fruit, will produce a concept of reality unknown to classical antiquity—the reality of the spirit. The ground for esthetics is thus being prepared within the framework of philosophy, where the problem of art can be formulated. But the middle ages still work within the same set of concepts as did ancient philosophy; they cannot succeed in vindicating art as an independent and fundamental activity of the spirit. Yet the whole mysticism of love, which is no longer the metaphysical and cosmic love of the Platonists, but a re-creative virtue of the spirit, implies the exploration of a world unknown to Greek philosophy. It becomes clear in this philosophy that the whole reality cannot be contained within the well-known systems and that there is a possibility of one day finding outside those systems the place for art that they denied to it.

Humanism and the Renaissance cannot yet offer a new philosophy to refute the old. Thinkers are still seeking but not yet finding it, although their research has a notable importance and marks an advance upon both antiquity and the middle ages. The history of the Renaissance esthetics amounts to hardly anything more than the history of the fortune of Aristotle's *Poetics*, especially in Italy. Only a few discordant voices break the chorus of laudatory comment upon Aristotle. They are the echoes of the humanistic revolt against him, which has broken with tradition, although it has no doctrine of its own. They are the free lances, the academicians without academy, the rebellious innovators, who attack rules and exalt genius, poetic frenzy, and the irrational nature which bursts into the inspiration of the great artists. There is yet too little to allow us to speak of a concept of art founded on a philosophy of art.

But already the ferment of spiritualism that was at work in medieval Christianity is beginning to show its effects and to reveal through them its tendencies. In the first place, Humanism is beginning to effect that revolution of thought which will mark the most striking difference between ancient and modern times. The reality that now begins to attract men's minds, and to arouse their main interest, is no longer the reality which they find in the world but that which they create in it. Man begins to feel a power capable of confronting and opposing nature; his independence and creative energy are already asserted though not yet proved. Man's power and virtue are seen as capable of winning over fortune and all those events on which he has no control and which constitute his nature. This human energy is most evident and most striking in art and literature, in which man fancies an inner world of his own where he can enclose himself and reign as absolute master. Hence the Renaissance passion for art, which springs from the intuition of our own nature as the best proof of man's dignity and power. The whole human world is thus colored with this esthetic subjectivism.

In the second place, with Bruno and Campanella the revolt against Aristotelian and academic tradition is no longer a matter of individual prejudice or whim. It is connected with their philosophical attitude which, though antiquated in appearance, has a strong originality. The doctrine of nature held by these philosophers might be compared, as it was by themselves, to that of the pre-Socratics, now re-enthroned by the critics of Aristotle and, in reaction against his excessive authority, placed far above him. But in truth this new nature had nothing in common with that of the ancient "physiologists." It is no longer something anteceding the spirit; it is universal nature whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere—the nature spoken of by the hermetic writers. It is the infinite which is all in the whole, which is an identity of the infinitely great and the infinitely small, and of the macrocosm with the microcosm. Therefore its pulsing life is concentrated in man's own soul, which is now understood in its deepest universal meaning. This is why poetic genius is now conceived as a heroic frenzy, and man's sense is a *sensus rerum*, the foundation of all truth and of all inner certainty. So nature is everything and the rules are an intellectual pedantry which have nothing to do with reality. The revolt against Aristotle has also an importance in esthetics that cannot be neglected. We may say that modern thought is already knocking at the door.

4. *From Galileo to Vico and Baumgarten*

Before the door could be opened, the revolution just mentioned had to be accomplished. Nature had to disappear from the mind and leave its place to the spirit. This change in the mind was not possible until men came to understand the origin of this concept of unmediated, material, brutal nature, anteceding the spirit, and from whose tyranny the spirit wants to free itself. This is the well-known problem of science or of knowledge. It begins with Galileo, goes on with Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and Leibniz, to mention only the most famous names. The problem is no longer what we are to think of this world which is present in our thought, but rather how we are able to know what we may reasonably claim that we do know.

The problem is no longer that of truth, but of certainty. Galileo points to *esperienza sensata* (sense experience) as the basis of mathematics by which the understanding can rigorously define the operations of nature. Bacon overthrows deductive, *a priori* science, which starts from ideas, and demands an *instauratio magna ab imis fundamentis*[c] on the basis of sense perception—the immediate datum which the spirit finds within itself whenever it comes into contact with nature. But then comes Descartes to point out (not without the help of some hints derived from Campanella) that this sense perception, which seems to draw the spirit outside itself and to offer it a reality of which it can have no certainty even when confronted with the evidence of sense, is not all. There is another sort of sense (Descartes calls it thought, using that term loosely as equivalent to consciousness) which has its real object not outside it but within itself, a sense which creates the reality it senses, the sense of our own active being (*cogito ergo sum*). This is the foundation of all certainty, the firm basis on which the edifice of knowledge can be securely raised. But Descartes does not overcome dualism. He admits two substances (mind and matter and innate ideas, which thought draws from its own depths, as well as adventitious ideas coming from outside through a mysterious interaction of mind and body. Then comes Locke with his effort to overcome the dualism by insisting on the principle of immediate experience, in which nature and spirit are united in sensation—a material for reflection to elaborate.

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[c] The fundamental revision of the sciences.

But can we ever derive science from sensation—the science of nature, in which every effect has its cause and everything is connected in a single system? Where does the connection come from? Hume cannot see how from scattered sensations which form a multiplicity, from a fragmentary experience, can legitimately be born a systematic experience where the multiplicity is connected by relations not given in sense. Science, therefore, is for Hume purely subjective; it is not the science of truth. His position is one of skepticism. Berkeley, on the other hand, threw himself despairingly into the arms of immaterialism. He denies to knowledge the objectivity which, he thought, could only be derived from a material world, if such a world were conceivable. *Esse est percipi.* The solidity and the natural character of things vanish in his efforts to acquire certainty of their existence. Nothing objective is left except the raft on which the immaterialist always hopes to escape shipwreck—a divine mind, dogmatically devised as the real home where all thoughts are contained and unified. Skepticism always stands for the thought directed toward an object outside it and presupposed by it.

Leibniz saw that, in order to overcome skepticism, it was necessary to abandon the empiricistic position and rise above the dualism in which Descartes was still entangled. This he attempted by reconciling experience and pure thought in his concept of "development" of the monad. The monad is the whole and therefore (according to the Cartesian *cogito*) knows the whole and derives everything from its own nature. The thought by which it does this is identical with sense or perception, but it is a perception at first obscure and confused, which gradually grows clearer and more distinct. Thus, sense acquires the same value as thought, and the gulf between the outward and the inward is bridged. But the monad is finite, it is not the world but the mirror of it. The monads are infinitely numerous and their unity, which is the true infinite, is in God, the monad of monads. Here again we find a dogmatic device which indicates the breakdown of this imposing attempt to solve the problem of certainty. It breaks down just as did Vico's no less imposing contemporary[2] attempt in Italy. Vico contrasted his "new science," as a philosophy of the spirit, with the old science which investigated the truth of nature. He too rose to the conception of a thought which in its development is first sense and then understanding, and, as he said, unity of truth and certainty. For it is not the spectator but the creator of reality, and it is aware of the fact it creates (*verum et factum convertuntur*).[d] It is human thought because it is also divine thought, though it is only vaguely aware of this identity. Accordingly, what creates the world of nations is the common sense of humanity which is identical with divine Providence. But if this Providence, which presides over human affairs, is to give man absolute and indubitable assurance of his knowledge, it must be the same Providence which governs nature. This unity of two Providences, however, is for Vico an assumption rather than a certainty.

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[2] The chronological correctness of this reference was contested. But I shall not consider the contestation as demonstrating insufficient knowledge on my part of the development of the two philosophies.

[d] Truth and fact are identical.

But already in Vico we see art and poetry vindicated as the form of the first stage in the life of the spirit, and distinguished from science, which is the form of the understanding or reason. We now see that truth is not merely what is known in philosophy by means of pure universals, but also that which fills the mind with emotion and enthusiasm and cannot be expressed in theorems but only in songs. It is a world of its own, with its own physics, its own ethics, its own theology, perfect and complete in itself. And side by side with all this, we see, in the school of Leibniz, the science of esthetics developed by Baumgarten—the science of a kind of knowledge different from rational or speculative knowledge: *cognitio sensitiva.* Though sensuous, this form of knowledge is already as much cognitive as the other and is endowed as much as the other with a value of its own, even if an inferior one.

5. *From Kant to Hegel*

Thus, modern philosophy centers upon the problem of art step by step as it vindicates the value of sense and feeling. And it brings the principle of art under the name with which it christens a philosophic science unknown to the ancients. For Kant was to call the first part of his theory of knowledge (in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) "Esthetics," although he assigned to this part the same scope and subject which Baumgarten had given to esthetics. For, according to Kant, too, the primitive stage of cognition, though a blind and obscure one, is to be found in sensuous cognition, from which he too begins the construction of our experience. Kant's theory of sensuous intuition, both pure and empirical, from which the ego starts the process of thinking, aiming at scientific knowledge, is one of the milestones of modern thought. Here truly are laid the foundations of the new edifice which sums up all reality, thought of without presuppositions and understood, therefore, as spirit and as freedom. Kant's "Transcendental Esthetics" had a much greater effect on the subsequent philosophy of art than had his *Critique of Judgment*, though the problem of art, which he explicitly raised in this latter work, was not present in his mind when he wrote the former. This problem arose for him in the *Critique of Judgment* from his desire to reconcile the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the *Critique of Practical Reason.* He saw in art a possible means of conciliation, because the judgment of value that can be applied to it transforms into a purposeful creation the mechanical aspect under which, as a mere object of experience, it presents itself. Thus everything in art must be understood not as the result of causes but as a means to an end. When the same value or esthetic judgment is applied to nature, the whole of nature, from a subjective point of view, acquires purposiveness as a product of the freedom which the *Critique of Practical Reason* discovered in the spirit under the form of moral will—a purposiveness that the simple cognition with its category of cause could not recognize in it. Here the main interest is plainly in nature rather than art. For the spirit must clothe nature with spirituality in order to transform into spiritual characteristics the mechanical necessity conflicting with the freedom which our moral experience has shown to be indispensable. The concept of art as a mechanism serving a purpose is more appropriate to technique than to art proper. And this goes to show that it was in the "Transcendental Esthetics" that Kant, without being aware of it, touches most nearly the problem of art.

Subsequent thought concentrated on the *Critique of Pure Reason.* And since the theory of sensuous intuition there set forth (in the "Transcendental Esthetics") showed the importance of the subject, the result was that the concept of the productive and constructive activity of the spirit was freed from that remnant of realism which survived in Kant under the concept of *noumenon.* For only if the ego is unconditionally productive of reality can it exhibit creative freedom and, in a word, be spirit. Only so can it be a spirit for which art is possible and for which is possible that spontaneous form of the ego which Kant calls sensuous intuition—the sensuous intuition without which the ego would have no foundation to build on.

After the attempts of Fichte and Schelling, it was Hegel who succeeded finally in leaving behind the *noumenon* and with it the last trace of realism. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* he shows how the spirit's criticism of itself and all its forms leads it to recognize the essence of reality in absolute self-consciousness. Before Hegel philosophy had only painfully struggled toward this concept of self-consciousness which is the form of reality as spirit, the soil in which the plant of art can grow. But between Kant and Hegel there had been an awakening of consciousness, still vague and confused, to the power and creative activity of the ego. The romantic movement had celebrated the freedom of the spirit and the spontaneous power of originality which is beyond the control of any rule or reflection. There had been a rich harvest of observations on art which attest to an absolutely new sense of the spiritual nature of art and beauty. Especially profound were the reflections of Schleiermacher, for whom the secret source of art was to be found in immediate feeling. But he never succeeded in developing this idea systematically or in showing how feeling could give rise to a work of art.

When Hegel says that art *is the sensible form of the Idea*, he is going back to Vico's definition, for he does not mean by Idea a concept or the concept of the mind, but self-consciousness itself, the spirit aware of itself and therefore truly spirit. This profound concept was not only extremely useful to Vico for his few essays of esthetic criticism, but it enabled Hegel to make an historical survey of universal art which is often extraordinary for its power of judgment and its deep insight. Hegel, however, made a mistake similar to Vico's, though on a much higher level of thought. Art is not, even for him, an indispensable form. He makes the spirit continually take on this form and continually pass beyond it to rise to philosophy, which is the pure form of the Idea in and for itself. Art for him is not inherent in the highest form of thought itself.

6. *De Sanctis and Croce*

The greatest thinker who has treated the problem of art since Hegel is De Sanctis. He had the great merit of emphasizing the sensuous form which Hegel had pointed out as characteristic of esthetic production, and of insisting on the absolute nature of this form, in which the pure content as such has been superseded and obliterated. Being a critic of genius De Sanctis applied this esthetic doctrine, not as a merely clever writer would, but as if he were re-creating the work of art. No critic ever succeeded as he did in communicating the charm, the inspiration, the warmth, the divine power and beauty of a work. As a philosopher he had the great merit of having always insisted strongly on the sensuous and passionate nature of beauty, through which we must bring our thought from vain abstractions to the concreteness of life and existence. For thought can only take a firm hold on life by the feeling through which it is deeply rooted in the whole. This was his inner reason for preferring Dante's *Inferno* to Dante's *Paradiso* and for his sympathy with the realism of Kirchmann[e] (so inferior philosophically to the idealism in which he himself had been brought up) and even with the naturalism of Zola. This was also the reason for the great importance he attached to physical exercise in the formation of Italian intellect and character. For he always saw art from a universal point of view and in its connection with the whole of philosophy and therefore of life. And the form of art was nature, feeling, passion, soul; it was the basis on which everything else is built, the life that pervades the whole spiritual world which surrounds it.

The thinker[f] who attempted to complete De Sanctis' esthetics of form with a philosophy which De Sanctis himself lacked, has in some way overlooked the doctrine latent in De Sanctis' thought and has invented a philosophy of his own, a patchwork philosophy which is the negation of true philosophical thinking. It first came into the world as mere esthetics, because the author was interested in problems of literary criticism and, having studied De Sanctis, he singled out, in the works of the great critic, the problem of the nature of art from the integral and organic context which gave it meaning.[3] But the very nature of esthetics and of history led him to turn his attention strictly to problems of logic; and as a result a volume on logic appeared alongside the preceding volume on esthetics. But this logic was nothing but a science of the concept—the concept as distinguished from reality; and consequently logic was taken as a particular, empirical science, and not as philosophy at all. Then, under the influence of the economists, he was prompted to reflect on the concept of utility, and under the influence of De Sanctis on that of will as conceived by Machiavelli, that is, as a mere force not yet moralized. Thus we are greeted with the discovery that this force is the economic activity and we are offered an alleged philosophy of economics. But the economic activity turns out to be only an abstract element of the ethical activity, since an act of the will must be either moral or immoral. So the philosophy of Benedetto Croce is completed by an ethics which, combined with economics, forms his *Philosophy of the Practical.* Everything is sorted and placed into four pigeonholes which are called categories: Beautiful, True, Useful, Good. And the famous trinity of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good is overthrown with loud cheering. These four categories became the foundation of the philosophy which was meant to give De Sanctis' esthetics a systematic form and to raise it to a more speculative level. The four blessed words seemed for a moment to be in danger of becoming five, when to the system of the philosophy of the spirit a volume on the theory of history was added. But it was subsequently explained that this was only a development of a section of the logic. The author and his disciples took up arms to defend these four words, which they displayed and magnified as the fourfold revelation of a mysterious and unknowable spirit. But the *Aesthetic* went about the world either as a single volume or in the complete set. The philosophy of the four words remained as a sort of external frame, which could be taken with the picture or detached from it. And to prove that this was scientifically possible (his philosophy was made up by patching together separate essays each independent of the others) he obstinately maintained that this was the right way of doing things. Being a man of wit and spirit, with a rich store of anecdotes, inventions, and pleasantries, he undertook a ruthless polemic against philosophy, ridiculing it as a theologizing philosophy, a philosophy of supreme problems, a philosophy for professors. In short, it was time to replace this old-fashioned metaphysical philosophy by something called methodology or elucidation of scientific concepts—in short by the "Philosophy of the Four Words." We have had to mention this philosophy more than once in this book because it is the framework of an esthetics which for many people today is *the* "Esthetics." It has won public favor by the easy style in which it is presented, by the clearness of the few ideas which it champions, and by the very polemic against philosophy which accompanies it and commends it to those who, like the prudent Agricola,[g] are all for a little philosophy, but just for a little—for an easy, elegant, literary philosophy, that *philosophia pigrorum*[h] which may have the point and wit and grace of Voltaire's prose. It has been translated into every language and is read as nothing of its kind was ever before.

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[e] Julius Hermann von Kirchmann (1812–1884), German statesman and philosopher of law, whose system was called *realism.* While accepting *a priori* elements in his theory of knowledge he rejects any absolute criterion in ethics and law.

[f] Croce.

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[3] See my article "Torniamo a De Sanctis!" in *Quadrivio*, August 6, 1933, reprinted in *Memorie italiane* (Florence: Sansoni, 1936), pp. 173–181.

This esthetics, coming after the work of De Sanctis, was a falling off into decadentism and dilettantism in literature. It took the problem of art out of the serious, religious, profoundly philosophical context in which he had set it, and offered a solution which only superficial minds could find consistent with his. For De Sanctis art is indeed form, but the form of life, of life in its whole complexity, including its moral values, its ideals, its science, its philosophy, and its religious ideas. Such a form implies and presupposes a world and indeed the universe, though in fact it resolves into itself all that it presupposes. And this universe is the Idea, in the profound Hegelian meaning. It is a universe from which the critic cannot detach himself; he must feel it within himself and seek to discover it through art or in his own criticism. And so, unintentionally, he becomes a master in the art of living, a "professor" as De Sanctis acknowledged himself to be. Through De Sanctis' esthetics and criticism we are indeed able to enter into the world of poetry and dwell in it, for within it we find the whole of life and all its laws. We are no longer men of letters, but men. That is why De Sanctis never tired of warning: "Remember that the esthetics of form never does away with content!"[4]

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[g] Tacitus, *Agricola*, IV.

[h] Philosophy of lazy men.

7. *This Book*

In this essay we have taken up the problem of De Sanctis with a critical awareness of its subsequent misconstructions. We have aimed at tracing art back to its sources, and thus at understanding it within the framework of a philosophy which preserves both its intrinsic nature and its function in the life of the spirit. For this must be the aim of a philosophy which takes life seriously and is aware of its own moral responsibility. Looked at in this light, we have seen art to be something more than the miraculous and quintessential art of genius; it is an everyday thing more precious than bread itself. It is the source within us which animates us with the mighty life of the universe, in which we all recognize a creative power, manifesting itself in a thousand forms, though always hidden; present everywhere in its effects, yet nowhere visible or apprehensible. It is the life, the self, the living being of the self, the feeling with which we are born and on which we live. It is the central heart, which beats with the pulse of infinite nature and from which flows, by the power of thought, the infinite reality that we think. It is the infinite self-consciousness within which all drama is developed, all victories are celebrated, and the kingdom of the spirit is realized. Were it not for this nodal point, where nature seems to end but from where in fact the spirit begins, we would have no existence, and whatever our thinking, our being would evaporate in a world of abstract logic. But through this nodal point we are anchored firmly to the earth and our mind has contact with nature and the joys of light and life. Hither we all unconsciously turn to assure ourselves of the real world, no dream but the solid ground of our experience. But when we grow clearly conscious of what this nature is, we shall no longer call it nature but rather our system of experience, chained to a center which is the subject, the feeling, the firm, immovable foundation of our very being.

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[4] In his essay "Settembrini e i suoi critici" (1869), in *Nuovi saggi critici.*

Thought is the whole world, the whole reality. But the Atlas who bears up this world, where life means joy, is feeling. Feeling sometimes urges us to go to the great works of art as to a source of life; but always it bids us look into our own hearts, to remind ourselves that the round world rests solidly on its foundations.

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